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Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSAs): Their use and development for young people with learning disabilities who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour in England

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSAs): Their use and development for young people with learning disabilities who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour in England

A Circle of Support and Accountability (CoSA) is an offender support model associated with high risk adult sex offenders after release from prison. It works by establishing a supportive social network of community volunteers who assist the ex-offender (core member) with reintegration and his/her ongoing risk responsibilities. This thesis critically explores the application of this model to a small group of young/adolescent men with learning disabilities who were assessed as posing a risk of exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour.

Focus groups, interviews and case record data were gathered between January, 2013 and December 2015 to establish four qualitative case studies. Data was explored by considering how the model was adapted for young people with learning disabilities, the tensions between the dual aims of support and accountability and the viability of managing the risk of a group of vulnerable individuals. These questions were examined using theories of offender risk management, restorative justice, rehabilitation, social networks and community treatment programmes.

The study explores the experiences of participants of the CoSA. Whilst social support was shown to be a strong and adaptive tool, accountability and risk management proved confusing and confrontational. The CoSAs in this study remained associated with high risk sex offenders and were troubled with problems of labelling and stigma. These findings question whether the existing model can and should be used with such vulnerable individuals. The thesis concludes by arguing that any programme for young people with learning disabilities who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour should be socially driven and welfare orientated and not a managerial, criminal justice solution determined by risk.

Keywords: CoSA, Sex Offending, Learning Disability, Young People, Risk Management, Restorative Justice, Rehabilitation, Social Networks, Accountability.

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Abbreviations

BILD – the British Institute of Learning Disabilities
BPS – British Psychological Society
BSA – British Sociological Association
CAQDAS - Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CBT – Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CM – Core Member
CJS – Criminal Justice System
CoSA – Circles of Support and Accountability
CRC – Community Rehabilitation Companies
DBS – Disclosure and Barring Service
DDR – Dynamic Risk Review
FTO – Foreign Travel Order
GLM – Good Lives Model
HMPPS – HM Prison and Probation Service
IPP – Imprisonment for Public Protection
IQ – Intelligence Quotient
LD – Learning Disability
RNR - Risk, Needs and Responsivity
MAPPA – Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements
NPS – National Probation Service
NSPCC – National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
PrB – Payment by Results
RM 2000 – Risk Management 2000
RRASOR - The Rapid Risk Assessment for Sexual Offense Recidivism
SHB – Sexually Harmful Behaviour
SHPO – Sexual Harm Prevention Orders
SOGT – Sex Offender Treatment Group
SOPO – Sex Offences Prevention Order
SORAG - The Sex Offender Risk Appraisal Guide

SOTP – Sex Offender Treatment Programmes

SOTSEC-ID – Sex Offender Treatment Services Collaborative – intellectual Disabilities

SSEN – Statement of Special Educational Needs

UK – United Kingdom

US(A) – United States of America

YP – Young Person

Specific Circle Abbreviations

C1 – Circle 1

C2 – Circle 2

C3 – Circle 3

C4 – Circle 4

Vol1 – [Circle number] Volunteer 1

Vol2 – [Circle number] Volunteer 2

Vol3 – [Circle number] Volunteer 3

Vol4 – [Circle number] Volunteer 4

Vol5 – [Circle number] Volunteer 5

Vol6 – [Circle number] Volunteer 6

The exception is C2Vol1/C3Vol5. This volunteer was in two circles as C2Vol1 and C3Vol5.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Circles of Support and Accountability are “a constructive alternative response which provides a much greater opportunity for preventing further crime, rehabilitating the offender, and achieving safer communities for us all” (Lord Longford Trust, 2010).

This statement, issued by the Longford Trust on the award of its annual prize to Circles UK in 2010, highlights why many believe Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSAs) are fundamental tools in tackling sexual offending. My study explores how the CoSA model was used with a group of young/adolescent males with learning disabilities. They were included in this newly established programme due to their previous sexually harmful behaviour¹ and the possibility that they would repeat this behaviour. This doctoral thesis explores the CoSA with reference to the criminological paradigms of risk and risk management, restorative justice and rehabilitation. It is set within a multi-disciplinary framework which allows reference to literature developed in the fields of: criminology, sociology, psychology and law whilst firmly establishing the model as an offender risk management tool.

The CoSA movement started in Canada in 1994 when a high profile sex offender was released from prison without further ‘state’ monitoring. In response to the public outcry, representatives from the Mennonite Church agreed to take the offender into their community. In doing so they created a format which is now replicated throughout the world. A CoSA is made up of a group of community volunteers (between 4-6 individuals) who assist and monitor an individual (the core member²). The core member has usually served a sentence for sex offending and has recently been released into the community. The volunteers meet with the core member on a weekly basis to support him/her

¹ See page 4 later in this chapter for a definition of sexually harmful behaviour and reasons for the use of this terminology.

² The core member is the offender at the centre of the circle (see Appendix 1 for a diagram of a CoSA).

and scrutinise his/her behaviours, referring any concerning issues to the CoSA co-ordinator³. Traditionally the core member voluntarily requests a CoSA on release from prison, frequently on the recommendation of his/her probation officer. Referral in the UK is then made to a CoSA project provider who is affiliated to Circles UK (the management body that regulates CoSAs in the UK). The volunteers support the core member by assisting him/her with everyday problems, such as employment, housing and benefit claims and provide him/her with a social network. This support facilitates the reintegration of the core member into society. However, despite this reintegrative objective, it is the pursuit of accountability, the managerial arm of the model, which provides the greatest political and populist authority for the CoSA (Hannem, 2013; Richards and McCartan, 2017).

This thesis examines the lifecycle of four pilot CoSAs for young people with learning disabilities. These are jointly referred to throughout this thesis as the Primrose Project. The circles and participants of the Primrose Project are prefaced accordingly, therefore referred to as Primrose CoSAs, core members, volunteers, co-ordinators or management team. This is for anonymity and distinguishes the project from other CoSA research. The Primrose management team were clinical professionals who provided professional psychotherapeutic support for young people and adults with learning disabilities. The reason for their interest in the CoSA model was that they saw a need for a non-professional community response for those with learning disabilities who had exhibited sexually harmful behaviour. It was the strong restorative values and community involvement that drew them to the CoSA model. After initial investigation they concluded they would pilot four CoSAs to establish whether the model could work with their patient group.

The Primrose CoSAs were not only unique because they were established specifically for individuals with learning disabilities, but also because they worked with core members who had not been convicted of a sexual offence. Therefore, unlike most traditional CoSAs, the majority of the Primrose core members had not been charged with or prosecuted for a sexual offence. Whilst

³ The CoSA co-ordinator is a professional who manages the running of the circle for the service provider. He/she does not participate in circle meetings, but will interact with all the parties to the CoSA to facilitate the management of the programme (see Appendix 1).

this new service may have been triggered by a need to fill a gap or provide a specialised service, it extends the realms of offender risk management by creating a further category of 'risky' individuals (Cohen, 1985; Feeley and Simon, 1992).

This research is primarily concerned with how a group of young males with learning disabilities interact with the CoSA model and the problems and/or benefits that emerged from their inclusion in such a programme. The research questions were the result of an exploration of the existing research and the theoretical framework surrounding the CoSA model and are as follows:

How has the CoSA model been adapted to work with a group of young people with learning disabilities who pose a risk of exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour?

How does a CoSA for young people with learning disabilities who pose a risk of exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour respond to the concepts of support and accountability? How are the tensions between these concepts managed?

How does this type of CoSA, one for young people with learning disabilities who have exhibited sexually harmful behaviour, fit within the risk management paradigm?

The Primrose Project was evaluated by the analysis of four case studies over the lifecycle of the respective circles (between January, 2013 and December, 2015). Whilst evaluating the Primrose Project several research design issues emerged. These are discussed in Chapter 4 on the methodology; however, the most significant problem was the reticence of the core members to actively participate in the research process. Whilst it is recognised that core members' input is highly desirable from a research perspective, it was difficult to convey the benefits of such participation. There were several possible reasons for this reluctance, which are discussed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 on methodology, support and accountability. However, much of the Primrose core members' reserve was due to negative encounters they had with third parties as a result of

their complex lives and disabilities. Such experiences meant the core members became anxious around unknown third parties, which was particularly evident when they were asked to engage with those who appeared to have a professional objective.

Definitions of Key Concepts

Those at the centre of the Primrose Project were referred due to both their learning disability and their previously demonstrated sexually harmful behaviour. These concepts are difficult to define; however, it is essential that there is some degree of understanding as to their complexity at the outset of this thesis.

Sexually Harmful Behaviour

For the purpose of my study, the term sexually harmful behaviour has been used wherever possible, instead of alternatives, such as sexual offending or sexual abuse. This is not to diminish the seriousness of these behaviours, but to maintain the same terminology adopted within the Primrose Project. Sexually harmful behaviour is a widely used term within children and young people's services as it helps to prevent issues such as labelling and stigma (Ashurst, 2015). It should also be acknowledged that a further reason for avoiding the label of 'sex offender' is that it is very rare for a young person to continue manifesting sexually harmful behaviour after receiving the right help and support (Caldwell, 2010; Hackett, *et al.*, 2005). Therefore such labelling would appear to be both stigmatizing and erroneous.

This term suggests behaviour that goes beyond the offences detailed in the Sexual Offences Act 2003. It also implies an understanding of what are normal (not harmful) behaviours and behaviours that require both a legal and non-legal response (Griffin and Beech, 2004:8). There is no definitive meaning or definition of sexually harmful behaviour, but the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) suggest that, "[h]armful sexual behaviour involves one or more children engaging in sexual discussions or acts

that are inappropriate for their age or stage of development. These can range from using sexually explicit words and phrases to full penetrative sex with other children or adults” (NSPCC, 2013). A further definition is that offered by Hackett (2014) and cited in his co-authored Harmful Sexual Behaviour Framework (Hackett *et al.*, 2016: 12); “sexual behaviours expressed by children and young people under the age of 18 years old that are developmentally inappropriate, may be harmful towards self or others, or be abusive towards another child, young person or adult”. Hackett *et al.*, (2016) also refer to continuums of behaviour to assist with these wide and complicated definitions. Despite this difficulty in defining sexually harmful behaviour, it has been suggested that such behaviour is a concern that both welfare and criminal justice systems have to respond to on a regular basis (Hackett *et al.*, 2015). The above definitions could apply to the core members in my study. They all exhibited sexually harmful behaviour and were assessed as posing a risk of exhibiting future sexually harmful behaviour.

Learning Disability

There are many ways of describing the fact that the Primrose core members have an intellectual impairment, but for similar reasons to those given for using sexually harmful behaviour (i.e. consistency with term used by the Primrose Project participants) learning disability will be used throughout this thesis. There is no universally utilised definition for learning disabilities. Learning disability has frequently been connected to an individual’s IQ measurement, with a score of less than 70 being considered indicative of a learning disability (Bradley, 2009; Jones, 2007; Vizard, 2014). However, the British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD) (2014) has suggested that this is a measurement of the degree of intellectual impairment rather than a definition. They argue that such a measure adds little value when considering an individual’s personal and support requirements (BILD, 2014). The British Psychological Society (BPS) (2000:4) have highlighted three core criteria that need to be met to suggest someone has a learning disability. These are a “significant impairment of intellectual functioning, significant impairment of adaptive/social functioning [and that the] age of onset [was] before adulthood”.

The Bradley Report (2009), the Prison Reform Trust (Loucks, 2007) and the Primrose management team have used the definition detailed in the Government's White Paper, *Valuing People*, which takes into account "impaired intelligence and impaired social functioning" (Department of Health, 2001:14). Such impairments need to be established prior to adulthood and have a lasting effect on the individual's development. Mencap (ND) use a similar definition stating that "a learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities – for example household tasks, socialising or managing money – which affects someone for their whole life".

It is also important at this stage to not only recognise the complexities of the definitions attached to those at the centre of this study, but also acknowledge that their lives tend to be equally as complicated and challenging. Vizard *et al.* (2007; 61-63) state that young people who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour are not a homogenous group, however, they often share common background factors. This includes neglect and abuse, often resulting in removal from their family home. They also have diverse and complicated emotional, social, psychological, economic, communication and physical deficits making any effective service offering for this group equally as complex and resource heavy (Almond *et al.*, 2006). The above statements ring true for the core members in my study. All have been diagnosed as having a learning disability and all have experienced many of the issues discussed in the Almond *et al.* (2006) study.

Thesis Overview

The following overview highlights and summarises the subsequent chapters contained within this thesis.

Chapter 2

This chapter considers the development of the CoSA model and explores the existing CoSA studies, on a country by country basis, reflecting on the themes of core member recidivism/reoffending and the experiences and perceptions of those involved in the CoSA programme. This chapter also examines how the CoSA model is connected to the concepts of offender risk management,

restorative justice and rehabilitation. Whilst reviewing these concepts consideration will be given to: Feeley and Simon's (1992) 'new penology', risk factor prevention paradigms, Braithwaite's (1989) 'reintegrative shaming', offender desistance and rehabilitative treatment.

Chapter 3

This chapter reflects on the main parties to the traditional and Primrose CoSAs, the volunteers, core members, co-ordinators and stakeholders⁴. The chapter considers the concept of volunteering, the motives and drivers behind volunteering and how these attributes can affect such programmes. This is followed by a further discussion of the complicated topics of learning disabilities and sexually harmful behaviour reflecting on how the criminal justice system struggles to accommodate those who fall into these categories.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 is the methodology chapter which describes and justifies, with reference to the research questions, the methodology used in my study. It details the advantages and disadvantages of using certain data collection methods (i.e. focus groups) particularly with reference to the dominant CoSA practice of using community groups. The chapter highlights and comments upon the difficulties inherent upon successfully including those with learning disabilities in a research project, both from an ethical and participatory perspective. The chapter concludes with the researcher's reflection upon some of the issues connected to undertaking a research project with such a complex group.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are data analysis chapters which are organised around the central themes of support, accountability and risk. These data analysis chapters

⁴ Stakeholders are professionals not directly involved with the CoSA, but are those who play a part in the CoSA programme (See Appendix 1). They have traditionally been probation and police officers.

consider the issues and experiences of those participating in the Primrose Project.

In Chapter 5 on support attention is given to not only how the community volunteers are able to support the core member, but what part support played within the developing relationships of the parties. It also considers the impact on both the core member and the volunteers of providing such support, how it was delivered (through groups), the tensions between support and accountability and the concerns about the ultimate withdrawal of such support.

Chapter 6 on accountability acknowledges that initially accountability was a relatively confrontational and challenging concept and that it had to be reconstructed in order to work successfully with both the core member's age and disability. This is discussed in conjunction with the continuing question about CoSA adaptation and the tensions between both support and accountability.

Chapter 7 on risk discusses how the parties involved within the CoSA were affected by the concept of risk and the management of risk. This concept whilst apparent throughout the whole CoSA process was particularly evident within the volunteer's responsibilities with respect to managing accountability. This chapter discusses the part social constructions played in the management of the CoSA and whether it was possible to work within this programme without falling back on stereotypes associated with those involved with sexually harmful behaviour.

Throughout these chapters the core member's learning disability remained a constant factor requiring re-evaluation, reconsideration and change in the implementation and administration of the CoSA model.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 discusses the findings of the three analysis chapters in conjunction with the research questions. It details the positive supportive elements of the programme whilst critically examining the issues with both accountability and risk management. In particular, this chapter highlights the negative implications of using risk management strategies, such as risk assessments, with those who

have learning disabilities. It also questions whether the model for such groups should remain affiliated to the criminal justice system or whether it would be better placed within a social/welfare guided environment. The chapter concludes with a recognition of the limitations of the study and a recommendation for further research to promote a greater voice for those with learning disabilities who may be drawn into the criminal justice system.

Having set out the research thesis and following on from this introduction the ensuing chapter explores the literature, theoretical frameworks and connecting concepts which surround the CoSA model.

Chapter Two

Making Sense of the Development of CoSAs: Key Literature, Concepts and Theories

Introduction

This chapter will explore the literature and theoretical concepts associated with the CoSA model (particularly within the UK) and its connection with risk management, restorative justice, and rehabilitation. This will identify a series of research questions which will define the parameters of this thesis. The chapter will commence with a discussion of the development of the CoSA, exploring the associated research on a country by country basis. This is followed by an investigation of how risk, risk management and offender risk management policies and practices have ultimately informed the CoSA model. Consideration will also be given to the role that restorative justice plays within the CoSA, with links to both accountability and reintegrative shaming. There will also be a discussion of the paradigms of rehabilitation, desistance and treatment which will emphasise that whilst these areas are linked to and inform the supportive objectives of the CoSA they are all set within a risk management framework.

Circles of Support and Accountability

As highlighted in the introduction chapter CoSAs originated in Canada in 1994 as a response to the release from prison of a high profile sex offender. These circles were considered, by those involved, to be an extension of the restorative justice programme developed by the Canadian Mennonite Church (Petrunk, 2002). They encapsulated their restorative objectives of victim protection and offender reintegration which was highlighted in their motto of “no more victims - no one is disposable” (CoSA Canada, 2015). Therefore, the model started out as an informal solution generated by, and based within, a religious community. The format was replicated by a different Canadian religious community on the release of another sex offender. Both initiatives were heralded as a success as neither core member re-offended (Nellis, 2009; Wilson and Harvey, 2011). These encouraging results increased interest in the model which appeared to be a possible solution for the continuing problem of how to manage the risk of such offenders on their release from prison. The model gained recognition,

structure and reputation in Canada and was formally adopted by the Correctional Services of Canada (Fox, 2017).

In 1999 the Society of Friends (the Quakers) in the UK, began to investigate whether it was possible to replicate CoSAs in the UK (Nellis, 2009). However, the development of the UK CoSA model unlike the Canadian one was a government funded provision with ties to certain statutory services, particularly the probation service. Therefore, unlike the Canadian model, and despite the involvement of the Quakers, the UK programme was determined by “official agencies” and their policy focused directives for “public protection” (Nellis, 2009:28). In 2007 a secular charity, Circles UK, was established to manage and promote the UK CoSA model (Nellis, 2009). Its primary aim was, and continues to be, the prevention of further sexual abuse. It seeks to achieve this by utilising the concepts of risk management and reintegration. (Circles UK, 2015a). It has been frequently recognised that the British CoSA model, whilst arguably sharing the restorative and reintegrative concepts of the Canadian model (Hannem, 2013), differs from the original due to its systematic and state funded influences (Wilson *et al.*, 2010:49). Therefore making it a more government influenced and risk management focused programme (Hannem, 2013).

Despite being slow to adopt the model, there are CoSA programmes in five US states (Elliott and Zajac, 2015; Fox, 2017). It could be argued that like the UK model, the US CoSAs adopted a more managerial stance. This is evidenced by the emphasis the US CoSAs place on the model’s potential to reduce reoffending whilst downplaying its restorative roots (Hannem, 2013). Furthermore, like the UK model many of the US CoSAs were initiated systematically, rather than organically, with the assistance of government funding (Duwe, 2013). Therefore the political reality of the US CoSAs is that they too are likely to be heavily predisposed to prioritise public safety and risk management (Fox, 2017: 32).

Interest in the model has spread not only to the UK and US, but also Europe and many other countries (Clarke *et al.*, 2016). There is a body of literature which covers the development of the CoSA model in the UK, (Bates *et al.*, 2007; Bates *et al.*, 2012, Bates *et al.*, 2014; Hanvey and Höing, 2012; Hanvey *et al.*, 2011; Kirkwood and Richley, 2008; Nellis 2009; Wilson *et al.*, 2010,

Wilson *et al.*, 2008), Canada (Hannem, 2013; Hannem and Petrunick 2007; Petrunick, 2002; Wilson *et.al.*, 2008; Wilson *et al.*, 2005, 2007a-b; Wilson and Prinzo, 2002) and the USA (Duwe, 2013; Elliott *et al.* 2013, Fox, 2013). CoSAs have also been established throughout Europe, in Holland, Belgium, Bulgaria, Latvia and Spain (Circles4EU, ND; Hanvey and Höing, 2012). Furthermore, France, Ireland and Hungary are considering the CoSA model (Circles4EU, ND) and CoSAs have been piloted in Australia (Worthington, 2015) and New Zealand (Fox, 2013, 2017; Van Rensburg, 2012). Interest has also been highlighted in China and Japan (Bates *et al.*, 2014). Despite this interest, the establishment of a CoSA programme appears to depend as much upon the availability of funding as affirmative pilot scheme results. This is highlighted by Clarke (2011) and Kirkwood and Richley (2008) in their discussion on the CoSAs pilots in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

CoSA research and evaluation have primarily taken place over the past 15 years. The early Canadian research commenced with evaluations of core members recidivism and reoffending rates. These rates were compared both to other sex offenders and forecasted offending rates using standard actuarial sex offender assessment tools. Such evaluations helped promote the potential preventative value of the model and facilitated its growth, often being cited as promoting significant reductions in recidivism (Fox, 2013). Links to improvements in risk factor scores and desistance influences have also been used to show how a CoSA has the capability of positively affecting reoffending. Later studies have also considered how the core member, volunteers and stakeholders responded to being involved with a CoSA. These themes will be used below to explore some of the studies undertaken in various countries to establish the direction and implication of CoSA studies. Whilst many of the studies considered the motivations and participant demographics these will be addressed in Chapter 3 on the parties as they relate more specifically to the topics discussed in that chapter.

Canadian CoSA Studies

Recidivism/reoffending

The starting point for much of the CoSA research, particularly core member recidivism, was initiated by Wilson and Prinzo (2002). These two authors were heavily involved with the early Canadian research into the CoSA model and Robin Wilson continues to co-author many British studies. Wilson and Prinzo (2002) reviewed the initial six years of the Canadian circles by comparing three standard offender actuarial tool (STATIC-99, RRASOR, and SORAG) predictions to actual offending. These tools predicted that their study group of 30 core members, who had an average 36 month involvement with a CoSA, would commit seven new sexual offences, however, the group recorded only three further sexual offence charges. Whilst the authors acknowledged that the accuracy of these re-offending figures may be debateable, such findings were evidence that being involved in a CoSA lessened the likelihood of further reoffending. This study was the start of further work completed by these authors showing the potential of the CoSA in the prevention of re-offending. The Correctional Service Canada (Wilson *et al.*, 2005) commissioned a report on the CoSA programme which resulted in two frequently cited articles from Wilson *et al.* (2007a and b). These articles considered the impact of the CoSA on the core member using both quantitative and qualitative data. The authors conducted a matched control group study in which they found that those who participated in the CoSA re-offended at significantly lower rates across all types of crime, with a 70% reduction in sexual reoffending (Wilson *et al.*, 2007b). This evidence of lower reoffending was reinforced by surveys in which both the core members and volunteers suggested that the circle had contributed to desistance from re-offending (Wilson *et al.*, 2007a). Wilson *et al.*, (2009) completed a further study of 44 core members matched with 44 offenders who did not have a circle and again found a considerable drop (83%) in core member recidivism.

Understandably, this focus on recidivism was a constant theme in much of the early CoSA research as it showed that the model 'worked' and was able to provide a degree of risk management. Evidence of these factors was essential to ensure continuing support for the CoSA as, unlike other models, it did not advocate exclusion and restriction. Canadian studies have continued to look at

recidivism and assessment tools as a way of monitoring success (Chouinard and Riddick, 2014).

Volunteer and Core Member Experiences and Perceptions of the CoSA

Relationships within the circle were central themes in several Canadian studies (Chouinard and Riddick, 2014; Wilson *et al.*, 2007a). The relationship discussed in these studies was one of 'friendship' and one that develops over the course of the circle, often enduring after the circle has been formally closed (Chouinard and Riddick, 2014). Core member support, acceptance and increased self-esteem were also mentioned as positive responses to the circle experience (Chouinard and Riddick, 2014; Wilson *et al.*, 2007a).

Stakeholder Experiences and Perceptions of the CoSA

Wilson *et al.*, (2007a) included 'professionals' or 'stakeholders' (police officers and agency workers) in their study. They stated that most stakeholders who responded to the study survey felt that the circle was a positive experience for the core member. The stakeholders liked the mechanisms of increased offender responsibility and accountability inherent in the CoSA, but were concerned by the perceived problems volunteers had with maintaining boundaries (Wilson *et al.*, 2007a: 299). Both the volunteer and stakeholder comments have a degree of commonality with those discussed in the later UK studies.

As the model moved on to different parts of the world, these countries began to contribute their own studies. These studies were not always directly comparable as the model itself was administered and managed differently not only in each country, but also by each state or CoSA organisation. However certain themes do consistently appear in the findings.

UK CoSA Studies

Recidivism/reoffending

The UK has produced a considerable number of CoSA studies. These studies were initially commissioned by the Quakers, particularly for the Thames Valley Circles. Evaluations were contained in their three and six year reports (Quaker Peace and Social Witness, 2005; 2008) and in the Circles South East/HTVC report (2012). The evaluations in these reports are detailed in subsequent articles and focused on core member recidivist behaviours and reoffending. Andrew Bates, a forensic psychologist for the Thames Valley Probation Service presented the evaluations in both of the first two reports and co-authored the ten year report with Rebekah Saunders, Dominic Williams, Chris Wilson and Dr Robin Wilson (the original Canadian CoSA researcher). The key finding of the 10 year report was that “no Circles South East core member has been convicted of any contact sexual offence taking place since they had been in a Circle” (Circles South East/HTVC, 2012: 45).

In an evaluation of 60 Hampshire and Thames Valley Circle case files, Bates *et al.* (2012) highlighted that only one core member had been identified as having been reconvicted for a sexual offence. Much emphasis was put on the fact that this offence was a non-contact offence and therefore the core member’s behaviour could still be classed as ‘improving’. He was still a risk, but his risk had been reduced.

In this study, the researchers considered not only actual recidivism, but also risk factors associated with offending. They did this by assessing case data using a commonly used prison and probation service tool (Offender Assessment System, OASys). They found that the involvement in the circle could be linked to improvements in the core member’s emotional well-being, age appropriate relationships and their families and support networks. It was suggested that these factors were likely to mitigate risk and recidivist behaviours and therefore lessen the potential likelihood of reoffending. This desistance from re-offending was also highlighted in other CoSA reviews (Armstrong and Wills, 2014; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008). The reasons stated for this were numerous ranging from a change in the core member’s perception of himself, positive

social modelling, containing and risk managing the core member and a reticence to disappoint the volunteers by reoffending.

In a later article Bates *et al.* (2014) explored the first 10 years of Circles South East (Thames Valley) and maintained that CoSAs assisted in the process of the safe reintegration of high risk sex offenders, thereby discouraging recidivism. This study used a comparison group and found “circles participants reoffended sexually or violently at a rate one quarter that of the comparison group” (Bates *et al.*, 2014: 878). Furthermore, when the researchers used the Risk Management 2000 (RM-2000) assessment tool to predict the re-offending rates of participants who had been in the community for at least five years they found that the CoSA group re-offended at a lower than anticipated rate.

Core member post circle behaviour has remained a constant theme in UK CoSA studies. Banks *et al.*, (2015) explored Yorkshire and Humberside CoSAs for the years 2011 -2015. Banks and Hough, both had operational roles in Yorkshire, Humberside and Lincolnshire Circles, and Milner was a senior lecturer at the University of York. Their evaluation considered the core members, volunteers and statutory partnerships involved in 38 circles using data from case files, questionnaires and surveys. They used data from circle case files, circle personnel and the Police National Computer database to review 15 core members who had been in the community for two years post circle. The examination of this data highlighted evidence of a reduction in post circle harmful behaviour with only one core member reconvicted, and this was for a ‘lesser’ sexual offence.

However, despite what appear to be positive findings, McCartan *et al.* (2014) concluded that there was insufficient evidence to suggest CoSAs had an impact on recidivism. McCartan *et al.* (2014) stated there were particular factors which could influence a CoSA's success. The fact that a core member chose to participate in a circle would suggest a greater degree of motivation to stop offending. Furthermore, when Clarke *et al.* (2015) completed a systematic review of studies on the effectiveness of CoSAs they suggested that findings of success were limited. This was because statistically sex offenders infrequently reoffend over the periods being reviewed (Clarke *et al.*, 2015: 24). They also acknowledged that each circle was different, differing not only from circle to

circle but also project area to project area. This would inevitably affect the nature and outcome of the circle and researchers' therefore stated that a range of evaluation measures should be used.

In a model that uses 'no more victims' as its objective, it is logical that it is judged and funded on the issue of recidivism or re-offending. However, proving that someone has not reoffended or is unlikely to reoffend, especially in respect to repeated sexual offending, is difficult. This is due to both the absence of reporting and the low reoffending rates of this group (Brown, 2005; Matravers, 2003; Ministry of Justice, 2013a). Therefore, it has been suggested that any intervention measured on this criteria would be incapable of providing a statistical verification of success (Falshaw *et al.*, 2003). The lack of reporting, the small research sample sizes and the limited follow up time along with methodological inconsistencies have all been qualifications or criticisms raised in various studies (Clarke *et al.*, 2015; Duwe, 2013; Elliot, 2014; Elliott and Zajac, 2015). This difficulty in working with reoffending/recidivism/reconviction measurements has potentially had a bearing upon the inclusion of other measures and criteria in CoSA studies. This has meant that CoSA evaluations have often been expressed in terms of decreasing offender risk scores over various assessment tools or 'lesser' offences (Banks *et al.*, 2015; Bates *et al.*, 2012; McCartan *et al.*, 2014; Wilson *et al.*, 2010).

In the UK, a bespoke assessment tool, the Dynamic Risk Review (DRR), was created to further assist with the continuing evaluation and assessment of core members throughout the lifecycle of the CoSA (Bates and Wagner, 2012). The DRR was used in the Banks *et al.* (2015) study to compare 23 core members pre and post circle DRR scores. They found positive changes in all the areas measured. These included changes in not only sexual thoughts and behaviours, but also in feelings of loneliness, powerlessness, inadequacy and self-esteem. However, despite their use of the DRR, the authors had concerns about this tool, stating it "holds no predictive or psychometric value" (Banks *et al.*, 2015: 35). They also noted that there was no standardised training for use of the tool. Concerns about the DRR were also raised in the Primrose Project and are discussed in Chapter 7 on risk.

In the most recent UK study, a Cabinet Office - Social Action Fund Evaluation completed by Kieran McCartan (2016), the DRR was also used to evaluate the impact of the CoSA. This research project was a mixed methods study using data from core member databases, DRRs, volunteer surveys and qualitative interviews. McCartan used data from standard and adapted DRRs to explore the core member's continuing attitudes. The standard DRRs were completed by the volunteers and co-ordinator and the adapted DRRs were completed by the core member and co-ordinator. Both the standard and adapted DRR data indicated that the core member left the circle with a lower risk status. However, there were discrepancies between the two sets of DRRs which suggested that there was no conclusive consensus between the circle participants about the core member's changing risk patterns. This was highlighted as an area of potential discord within the circle. Such a finding is perhaps not surprising considering the nature and accuracy of such tools as will be discussed later in this chapter. This finding also confirms the constructed nature of risk and that risk is a subjective concept dependent upon the assessor's background, experiences and cognitive capacities. This topic is debated at length in my study and is discussed further in Chapter 7 on risk.

Core Member and Volunteer Experiences and Perceptions of the CoSA

Many of the UK studies looked at the experiences of those involved with a CoSA. One of the major themes of these studies has been the nature of the relationship between the core member and the volunteers. The importance of this relationship and the mutual trust and respect of both the volunteers and core member was considered to be fundamental to an effective CoSA (Circles South East/HTVC, 2012; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008; Quaker Peace and Social Witness, 2005; 2008). Thomas *et al.*, (2014) explored the core member and volunteer relationships, particularly with reference to its potential for enhancing core member rehabilitation. This study was based on research undertaken by the University of Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan University. It was a three year study which included data from core member case files and interviews from all the parties. The researchers concentrated on the experience of those involved in 20 circles and, as with other research (Clarke *et al.*, 2015;

McCartan, *et al.*, 2014), suggested that the CoSA was consistent with the therapeutic objectives established under the Good Lives Model of offender rehabilitation (Ward and Maruna, 2007a and b).

Thomas *et al.*, (2014) found that although all the parties viewed a trusting and respectful relationship as central to the success of a CoSA, the relationship that developed within the circle was difficult to describe. It was not always one of 'friendship', but was a friendly one. The non-professional nature of the relationship was viewed as significant and is a recurring theme in several UK and non-UK studies (Armstrong and Wills, 2014; Fox, 2013; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008; Bates *et al.*, 2012; Quaker Peace and Social Witness, 2008; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). The non-professional and unpaid status of the volunteers was considered important by all the parties to the CoSA, (the core member, volunteers and stakeholders), however, the reasons for its importance were subtly different. The core members felt that the nature of the relationship signified the potential for future societal acceptance. The volunteers felt that by being a non-professional they were offering a different kind of relationship which fostered trust and reciprocity (Armstrong and Wills, 2014; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). These potentially supportive perspectives can be contrasted with the stakeholder's views. They saw this relationship as an effective platform for information retrieval and is discussed below (Thomas *et al.*, 2014).

All three of the most recent UK studies explored the volunteer's experiences of the circle (Banks *et al.*, 2015; McCartan, 2016; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). All suggested the CoSA had been a positive experience for most volunteers, with many stating that they would recommend volunteering for such projects to others. Banks *et al.* (2015) collected data from volunteers via questionnaires and rolling 6 monthly surveys. The questionnaires included "two free response questions" that focused on what the volunteer found enjoyable and challenging within their circles (Banks *et al.*, 2015: 49). The volunteers highlighted problems with the core member's progress as the most challenging, closely followed by working in a group and other volunteers. This was interesting when contrasted with the 2 highest scoring themes connected to the "best things" about the circle, which were other volunteers and the core member (Banks *et al.*, 2015: 56). The themes of the core member and volunteer relationship, its non-

professional nature and the nature of core member 'progress' appear in my study and are discussed in the analysis in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

McCartan (2016) also discovered in his examination of 62 on-line volunteer questionnaires that whilst the volunteers were positive about their involvement in a circle, they were split as to whether they would tell others they had volunteered to work with sex offenders. McCartan (2016) suggested this was an important finding as it highlighted a potential requirement for additional volunteer support. The reticence to tell others about their volunteering activities is something highlighted in my study and is detailed in Chapter 7 on risk.

Stakeholder Experiences and Perceptions of the CoSA

Stakeholders, who (in the UK) are usually criminal justice professionals, are frequently included as participants within CoSA studies. The UK research showed that stakeholders were originally concerned about the type of person who would want to help a 'sex offender' and whether they were capable of remaining focused on their risk management responsibilities (Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008). These concerns were further voiced in a later UK study (Thomas *et al.*, 2014). However, in many studies those stakeholders who worked closely with CoSAs were positive about their use. Favourable responses were frequently connected to the additional offender risk management capabilities of the CoSA. Stakeholders speculated that relationships within the CoSA could create a platform for the core member to disclose information to the volunteers. The suggestion was that the volunteers would have access to considerable information that could be passed on to the appropriate statutory representative. As suggested by Thomas *et al.* (2014: 20), stakeholders often saw "circles as an extra set of 'eyes and ears' for the criminal justice system".

The professional background of the CoSA co-ordinator is often considered advantageous from a risk management perspective by traditional stakeholders. This point was highlighted in the Banks *et al.* (2015) study. The 42 stakeholders (police and probation officers) who completed the research questionnaire suggested there was considerable benefit to the co-ordinator being a trained probation officer. The researchers suggested that the training and experience of the co-ordinator sponsored confidence in the risk management and community

safety capabilities of the circle. This rendered the model more “defensible” in the eyes of the stakeholders (Banks *et al.*, 2015; 76).

The issue of risk management training and the lack of it for volunteers has been a recurring concern for the stakeholders in other CoSA studies (Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). This issue was further explored in the McCartan (2016) study. In this study, the 15 stakeholders interviewed suggested that risk management and offender reintegration was the responsibility of the appropriate professional and not the CoSA volunteers. These comments implied that not only were the core members risk management concerns viewed as a stakeholder responsibility, but so too were the risk management elements inherent in the CoSA’s accountability objectives. This demonstrates not only the stakeholders concern about the volunteer’s risk management capabilities, but also highlights ambiguities with the concept of accountability and the role of the volunteer.

Support and Accountability

Thomas *et al.* (2014) considered the concepts of support and accountability in their study. They discovered that whilst support was seen as relatively simple to understand and administer, accountability caused confusion and discord amongst their participants. However, despite this lack of understanding the researchers found that for the majority of volunteers and stakeholders accountability took priority over support. McCartan (2016: 48) also found that there were different perceptions of support and accountability which were often “complementary, sometimes contradictory and often paradoxical”. He also found that these perceptions were different for each of the CoSA parties. The application of support and accountability in my study was also one of interpretation and is discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6 on support and accountability.

A further study which deserves mentioning, although it has little direct relevance to this study, is that of Elliott and Beach (2013). This UK CoSA research study highlighted both the potential reduction in reoffending by 50% and a cost saving of £23,494, per year, per 100 offenders. This shows the potential value of a

CoSA in not only public safety terms, but also financial gains which for a criminal justice system in a time of austerity could prove influential.

US CoSA Studies

Recidivism/reoffending

The US CoSA studies provide the only randomised control trial of core member recidivism (Duwe, 2013). Duwe compared 27 Minnesota CoSA core members and 25 control group participants over a two year period. He used five recidivism measures: re-arrest, re-conviction and re-imprisonment (for a new offence, a technical violation and a combination of the two). The CoSA group scored lower on all the recidivism measures with no re-arrests for a sexual offence. Duwe (2013: 160) was also able to show a US\$11,700, per participant, benefit when comparing CoSA operating costs with reconviction costs.

Core Member and Volunteer Experiences and Perceptions of the CoSA

Another Minnesota CoSA generated study looked at support and the types of support offered to core members by their volunteers (Northcutt Bohmert *et al.*, 2016). The researchers completed 10 core member interviews and 33 volunteer interviews in which they asked three questions about the support given to the core member. The core members received both practical and social support and the core member felt that this generated enhanced feelings of social well-being. Despite the positive nature of the provision of emotional and social support, the researchers noted that practical support plays a significant role in reintegration. They suggested further volunteer training and assistance with housing, employment and access to services may promote more targeted support and greater reintegration.

The other major contributor to US CoSA research and literature is Kathryn Fox, a senior lecturer in sociology at the University of Vermont. In 2013 she produced an evaluation report for the Vermont Agency of Human Services, Department of Corrections (Fox, 2013). Her evaluation utilised qualitative data from both questionnaires and interviews from core members, volunteers and co-ordinators at several points with the CoSA lifecycle. Fox focused on the social

and supportive factors promoted by a circle. She found that the CoSA, through the services provided by both the volunteers and co-ordinator, afforded considerable practical and emotional support to the core member. She found CoSAs appeared to work because they met the core member's need for support and companionship and that this was enhanced due to its provision of unpaid non-professional volunteers. Fox also suggested the more social the relationship between the volunteers and core members, the more engaged the parties were in the relationship. Conversely, the more focused on accountability the parties were the less successful it was. She stated that the team approach of the CoSA appeared to be beneficial, facilitating support whilst reducing the risk of colluding with the core member. The benefits of working as a group and the non-professional nature of the volunteers are discussed in my study in Chapters 5, 6 and 7 on support, accountability and risk.

European CoSA Studies

The European studies (predominantly written by researchers based in the Netherlands) have focused on the experiences of those involved with a CoSA. However, whilst the experiences and the impact of these experiences do have strong emotional, social and re-integrative themes, links are drawn to the core member's ability to desist from further offending (Höing *et al.*, 2017).

Volunteer Experiences and Perceptions of the CoSA

Researchers have also examined the personal impact of being involved in a circle for the volunteers. Höing *et al.* (2015) used a web-based questionnaire to ask about volunteer satisfaction and their willingness to continue with their CoSA volunteering role. They questioned the volunteers' about their feelings of well-being, which included both positive and negative emotions. They also considered whether it was possible to predict any detrimental effects due to CoSA volunteering and thereby guard against them. They found the CoSA volunteer experience was generally positive and that the organisational aspects of the CoSA and support from the co-ordinator provided a protective influence. Their findings led them to state it was possible to safely use volunteers with sex

offender management programmes. Furthermore, like the early Canadian study (Wilson *et al.*, 2007a), they stated that volunteering enhanced the volunteer's feelings of self-worth and emotional well-being.

What is missing from the CoSA Studies?

Despite the growing body of CoSA research and literature, there appears to be an absence of any real critical consideration of the model. The Canadian writer Stacey Hannem (2013) endeavoured to challenge the UK model. She suggested that the UK CoSA is different to the Canadian CoSA because of its emphasis on risk management and its incorporation into the existing criminal justice system. These differences changed the programmes' agenda from a restoratively community driven one to one directed by the requirements of public protection (Hannem, 2013: 283). She highlights that there needs to be a balance between these two perspectives and if achieved the model is capable of supporting the needs of all parties. However, her concern was that by positioning the model as one of risk management, the rights, needs and humanity of the offender would be obscured.

The UK CoSA was developed within a criminal justice system which has limited community options for sex offenders. The lack of alternatives may have meant that the model has been viewed as an improvement to existing community options and therefore any criticism could be 'counterproductive'. Professionals working within the area of sex offending may see the model as a method of addressing the need to foster change, a method of redirecting existing discourses (McCartan, 2012). There is a consensus amongst many academics that sex offending should be addressed in a broader more educative manner (McAlinden, 2007). Others, such as McCartan *et al.* (2015) have suggested that a public health approach is a more productive way of approaching sexual offending, particularly that of child sexual abuse. They suggest such an approach would expand the victim and perpetrator discourse and allow the introduction of social and interpersonal factors, making the problem a social as well as an individual concern. This would promote greater public engagement as the problem would be one that affects everyone, rather than just a few unknown 'others'.

Arguably a CoSA could not only promote a more productive discourse, but it could be a vehicle for the above public health strategies. It has been suggested that a CoSA, with its community participation, could promote a greater understanding of the area of sex offending (Kerr *et al.*, 2017; Wilson *et al.*, 2010). It could be offered as a preventative strategy (as in the case of three of the Primrose core members) and it is already being offered as a post-conviction reintegration programme. Therefore to criticise the CoSA model, which has the possibility of being both educative and re-integrative, could be viewed as regressive. The potential for positive change may have led to a reticence to examine the model in a critical light. However, a critical examination is necessary particularly with the extension of the model to vulnerable groups. Including such individuals in this model will draw them into a criminal justice offender management programme which has negative risk management and labelling issues.

CoSAs have been trialled with those who have serious mental health issues and have both violently and sexually offended (Ward and Attwell, 2014). Other groups have also been considered as possible CoSA beneficiaries, young people and individuals with learning disabilities, but as yet, there are no published research studies on these particular groups (Wilson *et al.*, 2015). Moving into these areas is relatively untested, although one of the initial UK CoSA pilots in Northumbria considered working with individuals with learning disabilities (Nellis, 2009). At the time of writing there are on-going pilot CoSAs for young people and people with learning disabilities and there is a recognition that adaptation of the model is necessary in order to make it accessible to such groups (Bates, 2014). Therefore one of the central questions underpinning the research represented here is:

How has the CoSA model been adapted to work with a group of young people with learning disabilities who pose a risk of exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour?

Despite the recent concentration of research and literature on the social and re-integrative factors present within the CoSA model, the fact remains that it continues to be a response to managing the risk of potential future sexually

harmful behaviour. This may be a continuing risk after a prosecuted offence or a risk prior to any criminal justice sanction. It also remains true that the offender risk management qualities of the model make this a popular and expanding model (Hannem, 2013). Therefore a CoSA, its processes and participants should be examined within the framework of risk management discourse to fully appreciate the dynamics and hierarchies of the model.

Risk and Risk Management

This exploration of risk and risk management commences with a discussion of some of the early risk based concepts. It will focus on the work of Feeley and Simon (1992) and their explanation of the emerging 'new penology' and its resulting categorisation of 'dangerous' groups. Sex offenders, who were once ignored, are now one of the most misrepresented of these groups. This has resulted in considerable legislation, risk management and risk assessment strategies all of which have been an influencing factor in the administration and management processes of a CoSA. On exploring these risk management strategies, areas of conflict between these approaches and the needs of the Primrose core members will be highlighted. These issues and the detrimental consequences of the risk management framework will be further discussed in subsequent analysis chapters and will be sign posted throughout this chapter.

Risk and risk offender management plays a central role in the criminal justice systems of many Western societies and is the backdrop to the development of the CoSA model. The concept of offender risk management was present and influential in the first Canadian CoSAs. This was evidenced by the early change in the model from one of purely support to one of support and accountability, thereby adding a degree of core member risk management (Wilson *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, in the UK, it has been stated that the model is an integral part of the criminal justice system (McCartan, 2014; 2016). It is also worth noting that Banks *et al.* (2015), Hanvey and Höing (2012), and Thomas *et al.* (2014) all stated that the CoSAs in their studies were managed by those who had been trained by and had continuing professional links to the probation service. Therefore effective risk management was a constant factor in the CoSA and one which was shown to be a major criteria for referral into the programme (Banks *et al.*, 2015).

Whilst the concept of risk was initially examined by the German social scientist Ulrich Beck in his seminal book *Risk Society* (1992), it is Feeley and Simon's (1992) renowned work on "new penology" that underpins my study. Feeley and Simon (1992) argued that penology had fundamentally changed over recent years and that this transformation had happened through penal, discourse, objectives and techniques (Feeley and Simon, 1992: 450). Discussion was no longer about transformation or rehabilitation, but concentrated on managing levels of acceptable deviance. Therefore criminological concerns were tempered by acceptable levels of crime. Language reflected this by prefacing crimes in actuarial terms instead of clinical or fault statements. This meant emphasis was shifted from intervention and treatment to "techniques to identify, classify and manage groupings sorted by dangerousness" (Feeley and Simon, 1992: 452). Under this new penology neither punishment nor rehabilitation was a priority, but instead precedence was given to processes which successfully managed risks. Such risk management is evident in the running of the UK CoSA where the core member's behaviour is monitored and scrutinised and if found concerning the matter is escalated. If such escalation results in a return to prison for the core member this is considered a success. This is a risk that has been managed and one that has not spiralled into an offence (Bates *et al.*, 2007; Bates *et al.*, 2014). This is also evident from much of the CoSA research where success is attested by core members having exhibited 'lesser' or non-contact based harmful behaviours (Banks *et al.*, 2015; Bates *et al.*, 2014; Wilson *et al.* 2007b). These are both reflections of what Feeley and Simon (1992) would suggest are success factors within new penology as they could be classed as evidence of operational control.

Feeley and Simon (1992: 456) also suggest the success of these risk management strategies are evidenced by institutional performance achievements as these are capable of measurement and more likely to be attained. It also means that they can separate or distance assessments of criminal justice institutions success from the "messy, hard-to-control demands of the social world" (Feeley and Simon, 1992: 456). Again this argument can be seen in much of the CoSA research, particularly with the use of the DRR, a tool which has been acknowledged as having limited use, yet is still used as a method of evaluation (Banks *et al.*, 2015).

Classifications of Risk and Sexual Offending

Feeley and Simon (1992) stated that the managerial discourse produced perceptions of 'dangerous' groups that needed managing. This inevitably resulted in the formulation of two categories: those who pose little or no risk (who can be ignored), and those who pose a considerable or greater risk (who need to be managed). Feeley and Simon (1992) highlighted how 'dangerous' could be attached to large disparate groups merely because they had the potential for "collective misbehaviour" (Feeley and Simon, 1992: 467). Pratt (2000a) further suggested the classification of 'dangerousness' was political in nature and that the direction of dangerousness shifts, reflecting the current concerns of the public, politicians or media. O'Malley (2004: 336) added that risks are not only political concerns, but are imbued with subjective moral, ethical and social judgements. Therefore the driving factors around such definitions can be emotional, reactive and not rooted in professional reasoning or evidential factors (Pratt, 2000b). This makes dangerousness a fluid construct with people moving in and out of it depending upon social, economic and political thinking and events (Burr, 2003; Kemshall and Wood, 2007: 204). It can also be suggested that crime control and policy are subject to these subjective factors, creating groups who are considered dangerous, who should be either excluded from, or managed within, society (Kemshall and Maguire, 2001: 243). The issue as to the nature of risk and how it affects those subject to its management is a fundamental part of my study and is discussed in detail in Chapter 7 on risk.

The construction and risk categorisation of both sexually harmful behaviour and those who perpetrate such behaviour has gone through significant changes, from what was once an unmentionable subject to one that is now a huge political and social issue (McCartan *et al.*, 2015:101). Those who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour are often depicted as a group of individuals who prolifically offend and are incapable of change despite treatment and rehabilitation (Brown, 2005; Höing *et al.*, 2016a; McCartan *et al.*, 2015: 102; Philpot, 2011; 31-32). In the media they are often described as "evil, sick or mad" and far from a 'normal' or 'ordinary' individual (Brown, 2005: 5). Media

coverage has contributed to the monstrous and manipulative image of the sex offender concentrating on a few unrepresentative and extreme cases (Matravers, 2003; Pickett *et al.*, 2013). This has included the murder of three young girls by men who had a history of sexually abusing underage girls (e.g. Sarah Payne, Holly Wells and Jessica Chapman), and the prosecutions of prominent public figures for historic sexual abuse (e.g. Stuart Hall, Rolf Harris and Jimmy Saville). Media discourse is based on interchangeable terminology, such as, sexual offender/paedophile and dialogue which focuses on child sex offenders. There is always a deviant and irredeemable offender, irredeemable not only because of the nature of the crime, but also the nature of those who would perpetrate such crimes against such an innocent victim (McCartan, 2010).

The issue of sex offending, particularly against children, saw increased attention from both the media and politicians in the 1990's (Kemshall and Maguire, 2001). This attention resulted not only in a growth of punitive legislation, but also an increased public fear and distorted perception of a group of individuals (Wilson, 2011: 49). However, this view of a group of men sharing similar qualities with predatory predispositions is an inaccurate representation fostered by the media and political groups (Brown, 2005; Matravers, 2003). The motivation of these groups appears to be more about garnering the patronage of a sensationalism fuelled and risk centric public than to provide information based on facts and evidence (Kitzinger, 2004; Wilson, 2011). This media coverage was, and continues to be, the main source of information for the public about sexual offending and is frequently without reference to any unbiased or expert opinion (Höing *et al.*, 2016b). Therefore, the perception of an irredeemable, sick stranger who is lurking in the shadows to violently abuse children and young people is over represented in the popular consciousness. It is also a construct that those who work with the CoSA model have to engage with. This has been highlighted by McCartan (2016) when he found that many volunteers were unlikely to tell others about their volunteering activities and is discussed in my study in Chapter 7 on risk.

Risk Management Response through Sex Offender Legislation

Risk dialogue has resulted in a divergence from trying to understand why individuals commit crimes to devising strategies which theoretically minimise the harms produced. As O'Malley (2010:1) suggested, an individual was now more likely to be seen as part of a group that needed managing than as an individual with psychological or social issues that required help or therapy. The idea that risks could somehow be managed was seen and appropriated as a state responsibility. Pratt (2000a: 38) suggested that by committing itself to protecting people from 'risks', the state was able to obtain and maintain increasing degrees of control over people's lives. Such control could be justified despite the pervasive, extensive and sometimes ill-considered intrusions into peoples' personal freedoms. This can be seen particularly with the legislation surrounding sex offenders, for example Imprisonment for Public Protection and Sex Offender Registration, both of which are discussed later in this chapter

The perception of sex offender characteristics and the risk discourse not only plays to populist rhetoric, but pervades both criminal justice policy and legislation (Brown, 2005: 12). It has meant that there has been considerable recent sex offender legislation, most of which is punitive and based around extended restrictions and/or management. It includes sentences that do not have the right to early release (Ministry of Justice, 2015), limitations on freedoms of movement and communication, and the creation of a registration scheme. British policy makers were not only influenced by their desire to respond to populist demands in respect of this group of 'dangerous' individuals, but were further swayed by the punitive policy emanating from the USA (Höing *et al.*, 2016b; McAlinden, 2012). This American influence still continues and can be seen from the recent introduction of polygraph testing for sex offenders (Ministry of Justice, 2014; Wilcox and Sosnowski, 2007).

The UK's Conservative Governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major started escalating the enactment of sex offender legislation in the 1990s, with the Criminal Justice Act 1991 being one of the first major changes (Wilson, 2011). This Act saw the singling out of sex offenders, mandating both treatment and supervision on parole (Wilson, 2011). It also had a considerable impact

upon the probation service, changing the role of its operatives from one of quasi social worker to one of public protection (Healy, 2012). This Act aligned them with the enforcement authority of the police and prison services (Wilson, 2011). Furthermore, the Act created longer sentences under the justification of protecting the public, using ‘dangerousness’ to undermine the philosophy of proportionality (Matravers, 2003). The Sex Offender Act 1997 saw the introduction of offender registration, which was lifelong for any offender whose offence resulted in a sentence over 30 months (Williams and Nash, 2014:11). The 1997 Act also saw the introduction of orders prohibiting certain behaviours, which included engaging with certain individuals (e.g. victims, victims’ families or those under 18 years of age), or visiting certain places (e.g. parks), or geographical locations connected to the victims (Matravers, 2003:13).

The Sexual Offences Act 2003 saw the introduction of civil preventative orders: Sexual Offences Prevention Orders (SOPO), which have now been replaced by Sexual Harm Prevention Orders (SHPO) (Prison Reform, 2015), Foreign Travel Orders (FTO), and Risk of Sexual Harm Orders (RSHO), which can be used with individuals who have no previous convictions (Hudson and Henley 2015: 562). These orders all seek to control behaviour and have criminal redress for breach (imprisonment), yet utilise the less onerous civil burden of proof. It is for the associated Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) panel to evaluate, via its risk assessment processes, which order would be appropriate. A SOPO once in place would run for a minimum of five years, but could be operational for an indefinite period. The use of open ended terms is not unusual within the area of risk management and especially with those who are considered to be capable of sexually harmful behaviour. The Criminal Justice Act, 2003 created a provision for the assessment of “potentially ‘dangerous’ offenders” and facilitated Imprisonment for Public Protection (IPP) sentences (Williams and Nash, 2014: 9). This meant that those who were given an IPP sentence for either a violent or sexual crime had to serve a minimum tariff. After this they would go before a parole board who would decide, based on risk and public protection criteria, whether they were suitable for release or not⁵ (Prison Reform Trust, 2008). As of December, 2012 no further IPP sentences have

⁵ “According the figures produced by the Ministry of Justice in 2016, 81% of those given an IPP sentence and still in prison have passed the tariff expiry date” (Prison Reform Trust, 2016: 3).

been issued, although the existing ones still continue in force. The IPP sentences were abolished by the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act, 2012 which created 'new' extended sentences. These extended sentences permit a further custodial extension after the original sentence has been served, therefore potentially replicating IPPs (Picton, 2013).

Alongside the changes in legislation, respective Governments sought to reprioritise certain public bodies, particularly the probation service. The Criminal Justice and Courts Service Act 2000 brought together the police and probation and, later via the Criminal Justice Act 2003, the prison authorities. Collectively through the mechanism of MAPPA they were responsible for ensuring public safety by evaluating and managing the risk of all sexual and violent offenders after release (Wilson, 2011: 51). MAPPA facilitated extensive rights to monitor, continually risk assess and impose conditions, including the allocation of risk management focused sex offender treatment programmes (Kemshall and Maguire, 2001). Within the MAPPA guidelines there is an obligation for participating authorities to share offender information as this is viewed as key to managing risk. This information sharing is justified by the joint participation within the risk assessment processes and the prioritisation of public safety, thereby negating any individual rights of privacy and confidentiality (Ministry of Justice, 2012:73). The development and evolution of MAPPA changed the previously support focused probation service. They were drawn into an environment where concerns of risk, management and segregation were at odds with many of their previously held rehabilitative objectives (Kemshall and Maguire, 2001, 248). This chipped away at the old probation philosophy of "advise, assist and befriend", which was further eroded by the use of risk assessment tools (Healy, 2012: 377). These tools were meant to facilitate the unemotional and swift categorisation of individuals into specific risk groups, negating many of the probation officers previously valued relational skills. Risk assessments theoretically enabled the professional to retain the distance necessary to utilise the MAPPA community protection model concepts of restriction, surveillance, monitoring and control (Kemshall and Wood, 2007: 207).

This was the environment in which the UK CoSA model was piloted and has progressed. Therefore it is reasonable to expect the UK CoSA to be heavily influenced by the risk management philosophy.

Risk Assessment

As stated above, risk assessments have been used by the criminal justice system to assist with the management of offenders. The constant concern of potential harm, especially from those who are known to have a violent past (the 'dangerous') has meant that considerable resources have been used to develop ways of forecasting continuing dangerous behaviour (McGuire, 2004: 329). This has resulted in the regular use of risk assessment tools to assess the likelihood of risky behaviour occurring. These tools are viewed as scientific and automated methods of assessing the risks to public safety. They replace the potentially subjective and intuitive interpretations of the 'unpredictable' and 'emotional' professional (Harris and Tough, 2004; Kemshall and Maguire, 2001).

Risk assessments are based on either "historical/actuarial factors [and/or] ... dynamic/proximal factors" which are used to evaluate both static (fixed/historical) and dynamic (changeable/psychological) influences in an individual's life (Lindsay *et al.*, 2008:93). These tools are particularly prolific in the area of sexually harmful behaviour due to the heightened public perception of risk and the Government's need to be seen addressing the risk (Wilson and Prinzo, 2002). They are used routinely to assess not only the risk of offending, but the viability of particular types of treatment and need for continuing supervision (Babchishin *et al.*, 2011; Hanson and Morton-Bourgon, 2007; Hanson *et al.*, 2007; Harris and Tough, 2004). Risk assessments are considered so essential that they have been modified to accommodate the many diverse groups who come in contact with the criminal justice system (Boer *et al.*, 2004; Hanson and Morton-Bourgon, 2004; Harris and Tough, 2004; Lambrick and Glaser, 2004, Lindsay and Beail, 2004; Lindsey *et al.*, 2001; Ralfs and Beail, 2012, Righthand *et al.*, 2005; Worling, 2004). However, there appears to be limited assessments for young people with learning disabilities who exhibit and continue to exhibit sexually harmful behaviour (Murphy, ND).

As discussed above, Circles UK have developed their own bespoke risk assessment tool (DRR) specifically for use within the CoSA. It is used to measure certain core member dynamic risk factors and is based on assessments used in sex offender treatment programmes (Bates and Wagner, 2012: 6). The tool was created to assist with the identification of the continuing risk the core member poses to the public through his/her potential sexually harmful behaviour (Bates and Wagner, 2012: 10). As stated earlier in this chapter DRRs have also been used as a CoSA evaluation tool to show improvements in the core members risk scores over the course of a circle. The DRR and its use within the Primrose Project is discussed fully in Chapter 7 on Risk.

Despite the widespread use of risk assessments, there are concerns about their reliability and accuracy. This may be due, in part, to the completion of the assessments by those who are not trained or qualified to evaluate the individual under assessment (Harris and Tough, 2004). This inexperience and the general fear of wrongly evaluating the risk can result in the over emphasis of potential risks or “false positives” (Matravers, 2003; McGuire, 2004: 336). This over-exaggeration of the potential risk was highlighted by Hudson and Henley (2015: 568) in their study of the use of SOPO’s by different MAPPA areas. They showed that instead of there being a decrease in the imposition of SOPO’s, as would be expected due to the reduction in high to medium risk offenders being managed, there was a significant increase. Other concerns suggested by McGuire (2004) are that the use of actuarial statistics means that the individual is lost. He points out that risk assessments are based on what a similar group of individuals would have done. This not only plays down the individual, but also ignores other pertinent relational factors, such as situational aspects (McGuire, 2004: 337).

Risk factor research (i.e. the research that underpins the effectiveness of risk driven offender analysis and prevention) has also been heavily criticised, particularly in the areas of juvenile crime (Case and Haines, 2009: 1). Case and Haines (2009:3) point out that programmes based in risk research give the impression of being free from bias as they appear to be scientific responses to statistically verified findings (Case and Haines, 2009: 3). Such research produces risk factors (i.e. attributes or situations which if present are likely to

result in offending behaviour) which are then politically portrayed as manageable. They argue that synthesising often complicated factors into illusory manageable criteria creates flawed results and interventions (Case and Haines, 2009). This criticism of risk management analysis could equally be applied to other groups, such as those with learning disabilities who cannot be easily generalised. They often have complicated and diverse social and economic backgrounds and complex cognitive issues. This would be true of the core members within the Primrose Project and the application of risk assessment to the Primrose core members is explored in Chapter 7 on risk.

The Risk Factor Prevention Paradigm

Risks are not only deemed to be manageable, as highlighted above, but also preventable. Farrington (2000:3) suggests that preventing a risk through identification and mitigation of risk factors, what he calls “the risk factor prevention paradigm”, is a simple and effective idea. The simplicity of this paradigm makes the concept understandable, easily explained by policy makers and practitioners and accepted by the general public (Farrington, 2000:7). The “ambient fear” that is present in many risk based societies, makes the suggestion of possible prevention almost addictive (Hebenton and Seddon 2009: 349). Much of the sex offender legislation already discussed plays into this idea of prevention, for example, the use of IPP sentences and Sex Offender Prevention Orders. Hebenton and Seddon (2009) and Hudson and Henley (2015) suggest that such sanctions have been liberally and vigorously used to cover as many potential or preventable risks as possible. Prevention can be applied not only to those who have offended, but those who are potentially ‘dangerous’ and eventually those who are not dangerous, but may become dangerous in time (Hebenton and Seddon, 2009). This precautionary zeal once suggested is difficult to resist and the net of criminal justice involvement widens (Cohen, 1985).

Zedner (2010: 24) talks about “pre-crime and pre-punishment” highlighting the similarities between certain works of fiction and the seductive nature of crime prevention, where “forestalling risks competes with and even takes precedence over responding to wrongs done” (Zedner, 2007: 262). She also maintains that

prevention has the potential of labelling someone a criminal prior to any offence being committed and ignores the fact that the individual may choose to reject the offending behaviour (Zedner, 2010:24). Ashworth and Zedner (2014: 251-252) highlight how persuasive the preventative argument is for any government endeavouring to manage all risks, despite having to justify circumventing certain liberal, ethical and legal values of fairness and equality. Preventative arguments can be used without any evidence to support such methods, ignoring implications of enhancing risk factors (Thomas, 2008). Sex offender registration highlights this point as it can aggravate known risk factors of isolation and exclusion and has no proven community safety benefits (Kemshall and McCartan, 2014; Thomas, 2008). Furthermore, there is no distinction in risk assessment protocol between “cause and effect” where an issue (isolation) can be both the reason for the criminal behaviour and its result. Therefore prevention, if connected to certain socially driven risk factors, is erroneous unless backed up by social change (Barry, 2007). This also suggests that risk assessments have the potential to discriminate or make one group of individuals a higher risk because they are trapped in certain social or economic situations due to their ethnic, health, educational or intellectual backgrounds (James, 2015:10-11). In the case of young people Case and Haines (2015: 226) suggest that by utilising such protocols they are being judged for failing to “resist and negotiate their exposure to psychosocial socio-structural risk (factors)” by an “adult-centric” set of processes. Many of the criticisms discussed here are evident within my study and are explored in Chapter 7 on risk.

Despite the above comments, not all commentators see risk management as something without merit. O'Malley (2004, 2006) has highlighted that risk is a political vehicle which can facilitate access to therapeutic and welfare programmes. He suggested that it might be possible to use risk models as a way of delivering re-integrative and restorative programmes to deprived and vulnerable groups (O'Malley, 2004, 2006). However, whilst there may be advantages in attempting to manipulate resource distribution by risk allocation, this has the potential of exposing a greater number of individuals to the criminal justice system (Cohen, 1985). This has particularly adverse implications within the area of sex offending with diminished individual rights and civil liberties

(McAlinden 2012). With respect to preventative CoSAs, Cohen's (1985) analogy of crime control being a constantly widening net drawing in more and more individuals is particularly pertinent. Whilst the underlying intentions for widening the net may be commendable (i.e. to secure additional resources for an underprivileged group), it nevertheless exposes the individual to the negative consequences of being involved with the crime control system. This greater criminal justice exposure is evident with the CoSA, which until recently was reserved for high risk offenders (Wilson and McWhinnie, 2013; Wilson *et al.*, 2010). My study will show that this model has now been further extended to include young people with learning disabilities who have previously exhibited sexually harmful behaviour, but who have never been prosecuted for such behaviour and pose a limited risk to public safety. Such an intervention may be justified on therapeutic grounds, but it still means those involved are exposed to risk management requirements and the stigma associated with such a programme (Case and Haines, 2015).

A CoSA therefore embraces many risk management themes, it monitors, assesses risk and endeavours to manage an individual in order to prevent further harmful behaviour. This is illustrated in the slogan attributed to the CoSA model of 'no more victims'. It is therefore inevitable that the core member's risk and the management thereof, is a partial, if not dominant, view point adopted in both traditional and Primrose CoSAs. This is because the model is designated for sex offenders who are considered 'risky' and 'dangerous'. Therefore the second question informing the research represented here is:

How does this type of CoSA, one for young people with learning disabilities who have exhibited sexually harmful behaviour, fit within the risk management paradigm?

Restorative Justice

Despite the fact that the CoSA can be conceptualised as a risk management tool, many CoSA advocates suggest that the CoSA model is predominantly a restorative programme (Bates *et al.*, 2012; McCartan *et al.*, 2014; Petrunik *et al.*,

2008; Wilson *et al.*, 2010; Wilson *et al.*, 2002; Wilson and Prinzo, 2002; Zehr, 2002). This section will explore the CoSAs relationship to restorative justice starting with the definitions or general understanding of restorative justice and accountability and concluding with a discussion of the part social networks and social control play in a restorative understanding of the CoSA.

As previously highlighted, the first CoSA was created by a branch of the Canadian Mennonite Church within their restorative programme. Therefore it is suggested that the reason behind the CoSA's restorative label was its religious origins. Others have described the CoSA as "a fascinating hybrid of restorative and community protection practices" (Hannem, 2013: 270). However, a restorative justice purist may argue that, whilst the model promotes many restorative justice values, it does not include the victim (a fundamental stakeholder in any restorative justice process) and therefore cannot claim the label.

It is hard to conclusively say whether a CoSA is, or is not, a restorative justice intervention as there is no agreed definition of restorative justice (Daly, 2008). In an attempt to achieve a common understanding of restorative justice many use the Marshall definition (McCold, 2008) which requires "all the parties" to be involved in the process (Marshall, 1996: 37). Another Marshall (1999) definition was used by Sherman *et al.* (2008:8) in a government sponsored document to highlight the difference between what they called 'restorative justice' and 'restorative practices'. They stated that the victim must have a role in the decisions connected to a post-offence solution for it to be classed as a restorative justice response. However, they do suggest that there is a possibility of an initiative being; "fully, mostly or partly restorative" (Sherman *et al.*, 2008: 10). Zehr (2002:54-55), a leading restorative justice practitioner, also sought to utilise a sliding scale approach, suggesting graduations of anywhere between "fully restorative" to "pseudo or non-restorative".

Daly (2002: 57) suggests that the confusion as to a definition of restorative justice is because such definitions endeavour to narrowly capture a wide and diverse series of practices. These are practices existing within criminal, civil and/or political arenas and which can be evoked at any stage within a conflict. She states the broader objectives are the fundamentals of restorative justice. She suggests that instead of trying to fit the definition into a simple and easily

applied sentence which only limits the concept, universal themes should be highlighted. This would then distinguish the model radically from the existing justice system within most Western countries (Zehr, 2005).

Universal restorative justice themes include the distancing of the state from involvement in disputes. Those in control of the actions and required to respond to the wrongful act should be those harmed by the act (Walker 2013). The wrongful act should be viewed as having a detrimental effect on relationships rather than a breach of a state rule. Responses to wrongful acts should be what can be done to repair the relationships, paying particular attention to the needs of the victim (McAlinden, 2005). Repair is therefore not a form of retribution, but a means by which an individual can offer contrition and restitution to both those who he/she has directly (victim) or indirectly (community) harmed. By doing this openly and honestly, and after suitable reparation, the wrongdoer will be reaccepted back into the community (Johnstone, 2011). The process is one of healing not hostility and this healing extends to the offender (Zehr and Mika, 2003; Zehr, 2005). Many restorative justice programmes seek to achieve reparation by facilitating a meeting between the victim and the offender. This meeting potentially induces remorse and guilt in the offender when he/she hears directly from the victim the effects of the wrongful act. Theoretically the remorse will be evident to the victim thereby helping to heal certain emotional injuries and ensuring that he/she feels heard and acknowledged (Johnstone, 2011).

When considering whether a CoSA is within the restorative justice framework, it is recognised that, without the victim's participation, a CoSA may not be considered fully restorative. However, CoSAs do share many restorative values: accountability, community participation and respect for all parties (including the core member) (Circles UK, 2015a). Within the CoSA, the core member, does not meet his/her victim, but is encouraged to recognise the harms resulting from his/her acts (Hannem and Petrunik, 2007:162). The core member is required to discuss his/her previous harmful behaviour and work with their circle to challenge and address any behaviour that may lead to further offending. Therefore, it is suggested that by accepting responsibility and altering his/her behaviour the core member is endeavouring to repair the harm done to the victim and the community (Hanvey and Höing, 2012: 57). Although the actual

victim does not usually take part in the circle process it has been suggested that the CoSA promotes the victims needs by endeavouring to ensure their continued safety (Hannem, 2013). The core member will potentially then acknowledge his/her harmful behaviour and continue to refrain from repeating similar behaviour. However, this could arguably be as much about risk management as restoration. This is because the model is set within a risk management framework, the criminal justice system, and these restorative principles will arguably be administered in a manner conducive to managing risk rather than healing parties.

The traditional restorative model of mediated face to face victim/offender dialogue is not often used in cases of sexually harmful behaviour. Although there have been a few situations where its use has been considered beneficial (Braithwaite and Daly, 1995). However, sexual abuse is considered by many as an offence about domination and manipulation and a face to face process may facilitate revictimization and endanger the victim (Lees, 2002; McGlynn *et al.*, 2012). Daly and Stubbs (2006:17) list other concerns including, “symbolic implications”, which suggest a degree of manipulation or trivialisation of the offence by those involved and a reinforcing existing harmful beliefs about sexually harmful behaviour. However, despite these comments, and because the present system frequently fails to answer the needs of survivors many believe that restorative justice may be able to respond in a more innovative and sympathetic way (Daly and Stubbs 2006; Hudson, 2002; Miller and Iovanni, 2013; McGlynn *et al.*, 2012). Others highlight that the reintegrative qualities of restorative justice may be a better vehicle than the existing punitive exclusive system to manage the community risk posed by sex offenders (McAlinden, 2006).

What is Accountability?

Both CoSAs and restorative justice work towards holding the individual accountable for his/her behaviour. As stated above, this can be viewed as a method of addressing the victim’s needs. The wrong doer will be informed that his behaviour has repercussions and that, if executed, will have consequences that will require that they “make amends” (Johnstone, 2011: 78). Accountability

is a key criminological concept. It can be used when considering, punitive concepts of 'just deserts', making sure the offender is punished for his/her crime, or for its therapeutic properties when utilised with specialist courts (i.e. drug courts) (Paik, 2009; Zehr, 2002). Accountability surfaces with relative regularity and to such a degree that it could be viewed as a universally understood concept. However, because of its common usage and ambiguity (where it can be both punitive and progressive) it is a term that has become so flexible it can be interpreted in many ways. In traditional retributive justice accountability can equate to punitive sentences and imprisonment where the sanction is holding the offender accountable for his/her offences (Calhoun and Pelech, 2010:292). In contrast, accountability has been included in many restorative models. It is one of the ways in which programmes are unified under the restorative banner as accountability draws in the "relational and re-integrative goals of the approach" (Calhoun and Pelech, 2010: 292). Zehr (2002: 23) states accountability and responsibility are essential elements of restorative justice. Therefore accountability can be applied widely and can be used as both a justification for sending individuals to prison or for using other forms of redress (Wilson and Prinzo, 2002). This ambiguity is highlighted by Calhoun and Pelech (2010: 292) who state that despite its importance within the restorative justice model there is no clear or uniform definition of accountability. This lack of clarity as to the meaning and requirements of accountability are reflected in two of the recent UK CoSA studies and is a prominent theme in my study as detailed in Chapter 6 on accountability (McCartan, 2016; Thomas *et al.*, 2014).

The use of accountability in restorative programmes is largely concerned with the offender being held responsible for the harms of the specific offence (Roche, 2003). Although there may be a future reparative element, this frequently relates to the plan put in place to remedy the specific offence, such as repairing a damaged item. Accountability is therefore not used to judge future behaviour or sentiments, but focuses on the harm that has happened. Traditionally the wrong doer is encouraged to understand not only that their behaviour was wrong, but that many people were hurt by the act (Zehr, 2002: 16). Offender accountability also extends to imposing an obligation to make amends, as far as is possible, for the harmful actions. Therefore there can be

both a cognitive and practical application to this accountability. If this description was extended to a CoSA, it would presumably be the core member's previous sexually harmful behaviour that he/she was being held accountable for, rather than future behaviour. Arguably, it can be suggested that the accountability aspect of the CoSA allows the core member the opportunity to acknowledge his/her actions and show remorse (Roche, 2003). This can then be accepted by the other circle members on behalf of the victim and therefore position the CoSA within the restorative arena. Hannem and Petrunick, (2007: 161) suggest the confirmation of such remorse and condemnation of previous behaviour by the core member goes beyond just being a restorative principle. It helps the core member connect with the beliefs of the community and thereby reinstates him/her as a valuable human being. Throughout the Primrose Project the volunteers endeavoured to work with the core member to enable him to voice his remorse in relation to his sexually harmful behaviour. However, as will be seen from my study, and detailed in Chapter 6 on accountability, the use of accountability does not necessarily produce a positive result. In a risk management framework accountability can be applied in a confrontational manner which promotes withdrawal or aggression rather than reflection.

There appears to be little justification in the restorative literature for the on-going monitoring aspect of CoSA accountability. This would be more appropriately aligned with the risk management objectives of the programme. This suggestion has been refuted by Fox (2015: 89) who maintains that accountability within a CoSA is exercised in a different way to its use elsewhere in the criminal justice system. Instead she describes accountability as "capacity building" enabling the volunteers the scope to teach the core members how to "sustain pro-social healthy relationships". Fox (2015) highlights how the volunteers in her study gave examples of their use of accountability. They were able to advise their core members of the appropriate response in particular situations which helped the core members foster relationships outside the circle. This adaptation in the management of accountability is reflected in my study and is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 on support and accountability.

The Importance of Social Networks and Social Control

Strong social networks have been shown to be vital for both the use of accountability and the success of the CoSA model (Armstrong *et al.*, 2008; Bates *et al.*, 2014; Clarke *et al.*, 2015; Hannem, 2013; Fox, 2015, 2016 and 2017). As stated by Braithwaite (1989:155), humans “derive pleasure from social interactions with others” and will endeavour to forge new relationships rather than endure isolation. Hirschi (1969) also suggests that strong and resilient social bonds are fundamental to the prevention of delinquency. The relationships developed within the CoSA allow the volunteers to engage with the core member in a meaningful and non-judgemental way. When the core member recognises that the volunteers are there to help and support him/her the relationship becomes one that can manage the possibly confrontational elements of accountability (Fox, 2015). This allows the volunteers to monitor the core member and discuss his/her behaviour, exploring potential consequences and their effect on him/her and others (McAlinden, 2005: 385).

This process has similarities with the restorative theory of reintegrative shaming in which behaviour is controlled by an influential community. After an instance of unacceptable behaviour, the community response induces a feeling of shame in the wrongdoer that prevents future repetition. John Braithwaite’s (1989) well-known work on reintegrative shaming highlights how the disapproval of certain actions, when voiced by those who have a meaningful relationship with the individual has a greater potential to induce shame. The shame can provoke regret and repentance so that similar behaviour is avoided in the future. Once the individual has shown genuine remorse he/she will be forgiven and reinstated into the shaming community. The shaming is undertaken respectfully, ultimately leading to forgiveness and reintegration (Harris, 2006: 328).

Braithwaite (1989: 55) suggests the effectiveness of an intervention depends upon how socially embedded the method of showing disapproval is rather than its severity. Furthermore, censure will be more effective if delivered by those the individual cares about rather than from an unseen hierarchical authority (Johnstone, 2011: 83).

Despite the opinions voiced by Fox (2015, 2017), an American researcher, about the strength of the CoSA relationships, the nature of the relationship between the volunteer and the core member should be critically examined. Is it

real or illusory? In Cohen's work on social control (1985) he suggests that boundaries between the state and the community can be blurred, with the community acting as agents of the state. Arguably this could be true of the CoSA, where the volunteers are acting as the state's risk management agents. Unlike Braithwaite's (1989) restorative communities the volunteers are initially strangers to the core member. They are tasked with certain risk management obligations within a criminal justice programme. Therefore the likelihood of a strong and meaningful relationship, especially at the beginning of the programme, would appear remote.

Notwithstanding the necessity of highlighting wrongful actions and the benefits of a nurturing relationship, it remains difficult to induce a productive degree of shame without encouraging negative and hostile responses (Harris, 2006). Shame can, if not handled sensitively, cause feelings of vulnerability, social rejection and result in diminished self-respect (Harris and Maruna, 2008: 454). The risk is that the individual shamed will feel stigmatised rather than restored which may lead to feelings of victimisation and hostility (Harris and Maruna 2008: 456-458). In a CoSA this shame can be induced by the use of accountability and the continuous reviewing of behaviour against previous shameful actions. Such processes could be viewed as a continuing punishment, thereby turning reintegrative into disintegrative shaming (Williams and Nash, 2014:7). This experience of continuing punishment was evident in my study and is further explored in Chapter 6 on accountability.

Braithwaite (1989: 101) advocates that shaming should be undertaken within a relationship of love and respect and only for a limited time to avoid stigmatizing the individual. However, for a person who has a learning disability these safeguards may be too subtle to preclude destructive feelings of shame. Daly (2008: 137) highlighted that restorative programmes may not be suitable for certain groups of individuals. They may not have the required level of emotional maturity or robustness to cope with the programmes use of guilt and shame. In a recent exploration of the success of restorative programmes (victim conferencing) with female offenders it was highlighted that women frequently responded differently to men in restorative programmes (Osterman and Masson, 2016). It was highlighted that female offenders were more often subject to abuse and social conditioning which resulted in greater vulnerability.

It was further stated that some women found the conferences difficult to emotionally navigate, that they aggravated existing feelings of shame and guilt and intensified existing vulnerabilities (Osterman and Masson, 2016: 9). One of the findings was that women often needed greater support throughout and after the conference process in order to manage their heightened vulnerabilities. Similarities between the Osterman and Masson (2016) research and the Primrose Project can be seen in the requirement of support to counteract their vulnerability and is discussed in Chapter 5 on support. This need for support and adaption of how accountability is exercised is also highlighted in Chapter 6 on accountability when discussing the strategies the Primrose volunteers used to mitigate issues of shame and guilt.

Linked to the above discussion on vulnerable groups is the criticism of shaming by Morris (2001). She highlights that certain low status groups within society who have experienced discrimination will respond differently to shaming. She has questioned the use of restorative justice with Australian Aboriginals who experienced frequent prejudice and harassment in their everyday lives. She explains that due to their day to day experience of harassment they may view shaming very personally. They may see it in terms of another instance of prejudice and bias. She suggested that it was unrealistic to expect this group to associate shame with reintegration (Morris, 2001: 11). Morris' statements would also be true for the Primrose core members who, due to their circumstances and disabilities, had experienced considerable degrees of prejudice and harassment. This is further discussed in Chapter 6 on accountability.

Both risk management and restorative programmes appear to suggest that accountability or 'taking responsibility' is solely an individual's concern (Gray, 2005). The individual is seen as someone who rationally chooses to undertake certain behaviour and is capable of changing this behaviour (O'Malley, 2004: 333). Offender interventions, like the CoSA, will endeavour to endow the individual with the requisite knowledge to make skilled decisions about the risks he/she encounters or poses (Kemshall, 2006: 65; Kemshall and Wood, 2007:208). Gray (2005; 2007) and Pitts (2007) both suggest that interventions often disregard the status and backgrounds of those involved. Therefore failure or further offending remains due to the individual. There is little or no acknowledgement of their continuing external problems or that they too are

victims. Gray (2005: 941, 954) also suggests that the restorative justice promise of reintegration for these socially excluded individuals is incongruous. This is because they would not receive sufficient support to achieve such an objective and it incorrectly presupposes that they had once been part of the excluding society/community. Therefore, reintegration is a misnomer. Many CoSA advocates would suggest that a CoSA is well positioned to not only highlight problematic behaviour, but provide the necessary support to mitigate certain social problems. However, my study suggests that many of the social and economic issues experienced by the Primrose core members cannot be ameliorated by a programme supplying limited and finite support. This issue is explored in Chapter 5 on support.

Rehabilitation – A Framework for Change

Both the above sections on risk and restorative justice have offender/core member change as a central objective. The change being from an individual who poses a risk of harmful behaviour to one who does not. Within the criminal justice system rehabilitation has long been seen as a fundamental method of inducing such a change. This section on rehabilitation will examine how the best known rehabilitative models seek to classify risks associated with offending with the objective of mitigating and changing the offenders future behaviour. Further discussion will consider whether the CoSA aids in the rehabilitative objective of desistance and what treatments and interventions have been used with sex offenders.

In the Thomas *et al.* (2014: 74) CoSA study the concept “a Framework for Change” was used as a method of explaining how the CoSA model embodies two prominent rehabilitative models: Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) and Good Lives Model (GLM). This therefore suggests that the CoSA model could be viewed as fundamentally rehabilitative, embracing its associated goals and objectives (Bates and Wagner, 2012; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). Rehabilitation is based on the idea that individuals and their behaviour can be changed through certain interventions (Zedner, 2004). These interventions can be supervision, training programmes, counselling or other forms of treatment. The probation service has traditionally been responsible for promoting rehabilitation, facilitating

the goals of reducing crime and re-establishing the individual as a non-offending community member (McNeill, 2009: 21).

Rehabilitation concentrates on managing the potential risk of reoffending, primarily by addressing potential offending attributes, such as anti-social behaviour, values and attitudes (Wilson and Prescott, 2015: 24). Interventions to address such issues can be applied as part of the offender's original sentence or as part of a probationary programme, and now all offenders released from custody will be party to a rehabilitation programme (Ministry of Justice, 2013b). An offender's risk is evaluated at points within his/her progression through the criminal justice system and potential rehabilitative programmes available will be considered as a method of addressing any continuing risk. If the Risk Need Responsivity (RNR) approach is the basis for an intervention or treatment the offender's level of risk (high, medium or low) will be evaluated. This ensures he/she is receiving the appropriate intervention, matching risk to intervention intensity (Casey *et al.*, 2013). Once an individual has been chosen for treatment/intervention his/her criminogenic needs are identified and addressed. These needs are linked heavily to reoffending and therefore managing them is viewed advantageous for rehabilitation and risk management (Andrews, 1989:8; Andrews and Bonta, 1998; Bonta and Andrews, 2007). According to the Ministry of Justice (2013b: 5) such criminogenic needs include: drug and alcohol misuse, impulsivity or low self-control, criminal attitudes, anti-social peer groups, lack of family and intimate relationships, lack of employment and suitable accommodation. Finally, to best address these needs the individual's responsivity traits should be considered. Therefore, the intervention needs to be observant of the particular individual and the delivery of the programme must be suitably co-ordinated with the individual's abilities (Brown, 2005:30). This risk management based approach has been stated as "the most fully developed and rigorously supported" rehabilitative framework (Burnett, 2010: 512).

However, there have been suggestions that interventions/programmes using the RNR model fail to motivate or engage the participants due to concentration on risk factors (Casey *et al.*, 2013: 39). Therefore other programmes using a strengths based approach, in particular the GLM, have been developed to enhance the RNR model. These models work with the individual to facilitate

positive outcomes, in order to develop better, more fulfilling and socially responsible lives (Ward and Maruna, 2007a and b).

The rehabilitative GLM seeks to promote the attainment of certain essential life goals through legitimate non harmful methods in order to achieve a satisfying and harmonious life. Any intervention based on this approach will therefore be concerned with helping the individual develop strategies by which these goals can be achieved (Casey *et al.* 2013). The model distinguishes between primary and secondary goals. Primary goals are things such as, “life, knowledge, agency and friendship” and secondary goals are the means by which an individual achieves the primary goals, “employment and education” (Hucklesby and Wincup, 2014:388). Falkner and Burnett (2012:136) further suggest that such an approach is not only concerned with the individual’s personal well-being, but also how he/she can enhance the lives of his/her family and enrich his/her community. Gannon *et al.*, (2011) highlighted that the GLM model was used extensively in UK, US and Canadian sex offender programmes. Gannon, *et al.* (2011) considered in detail the use of the GLM within a Sex Offenders Treatment Group (SOTG) for men with learning disabilities. They looked at a secure unit offering rehabilitation for patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983. They found that the patients made progress within the programme and were pleased to be asked about their life goals. This appeared to promote both patient motivation and engagement. In the Primrose CoSAs there were situations in which elements of the GLM could be seen, where the volunteers tried to promote any goals that could enhance the core member’s life. However, this was an area of volunteer frustration, which is discussed more fully in Chapter 5 on support.

Despite the benefits of goal enhancement it should be noted that rehabilitative programmes have been criticised, particularly for failing to consider the individuals social and economic background (Casey *et al.*, 2013: 35). This list of omission factors should also be extended to include the type of offence. It has been highlighted that rehabilitation, in the form of resettlement, for those who have been convicted of a sexual offence may be resisted by much of the community (Thomas *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, regardless of the inclusion of responsivity in rehabilitation, the context of disability needs to be specifically addressed. As highlighted by

Gannon *et al.*, (2011), those with learning disabilities may need further help and support to understand fundamental concepts. This suggests that CoSA programmes for those with learning disabilities and other vulnerable groups should be viewed differently elevating the need for support. This need for extended support is a theme which runs throughout my study. It should be noted that rehabilitation is based on value and moral judgements as to what is and is not acceptable behaviour, the nature and extent of acceptable risks and the appropriate response to such risks (Casey *et al*, 2013: 34). As is evident in my study this understanding as to what an acceptable risk is and how it needs to be addressed and managed is a highly constructed issue. It is based on an individual's social and economic backgrounds, intellectual capacities and life experiences. The implications this has on the Primrose Project is discussed in Chapter 7 on risk. Therefore rehabilitation for vulnerable individuals requires a degree of understanding and flexibility to negotiate criminogenic needs, responsivity and realistic goals. However, such flexibility and understanding may be secondary in a risk management centred framework within a criminal justice system.

The Role of Desistance in Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is arguably about offender transformation, a process which works towards the desistance of reoffending (McNeill, 2006). Desistance has been examined and explored by many criminologists with reference to general offending, young offenders and sexual offending (Farmer *et al.*, 2015; Farrall and Calverley, 2005; Harris, 2014; Judd and Lewis, 2015; Laub and Sampson, 2003; Maruna, 2001). There now exists an extensive body of literature which endeavours to explain how and why ex-offenders change their behaviours and how such changes or desistance can be supported (McNeill, 2006:46).

Desistance is often considered through two separate categories; primary and secondary. Primary being the initial cessation of the offending behaviour and secondary, the most debated and explored category, is the continuance of non-offending. McNeill (2009:26-27) suggests that secondary desistance is not only about enduring law abiding behaviour, but also visualising a different, non-offending and positive identity. This requires a degree of reflection in order to

create and embrace a different life. Such a change may be instigated by some form of social, educational or occupational driver which facilitates sufficient individual empowerment to create a new law abiding internal dialogue (McNeill, 2009, 27). Therefore, it is suggested that to enhance secondary desistance, any intervention or treatment programme should improve both the individual's human and social capital (McNeill, 2009:28). Whilst promoting human capital (improved cognitive and employment capabilities) is captured by many intervention and treatment programmes, building social capital remains more difficult as it needs to be fostered by being a functioning part of society (McNeill, 2006: 50). Social capital goes beyond just the social network provided by families and friends, but is the expanding connection base that is provided by these relationships, promoting ties to a wider community (Farrall, 2004:59; McNeill, 2009). These networks provide both one to one relationships and on-going social connections which can result in extensive support and influence in a variety of ways (for example, access to employment openings through friends of a friend). This provides both opportunities and a social environment which is more likely to support any changes in behaviour and personal identity (Göbbels, *et al.*, 2012: 456). Maruna (2001) points out that this different identity is part of an internal narrative which is important for desistance. He highlights that if an individual has a good self-image he/she can believe that they are a good person who had behaved badly and therefore has the ability to change. The enhancement and promotion of a positive self-image was something fundamental to the Primrose CoSAs. This may have been due not only to the core member's poor self-image because of his previous sexually harmful behaviour, but also his background and perception of himself as an individual with a learning disability. This topic is discussed in Chapter 5 on support.

Being a 'good' person ties into one of the major themes of a considerable number of CoSA studies which is 'relationships'. This is because a positive (and in CoSA literature non-professional) relationship implies others recognising the individual's worth. Relationships play an important part in both rehabilitation and desistance (McNeill and Weaver, 2010). In a report commissioned by the National Offender Management Service it was stated that positive offender change was facilitated by advice and support offered within respected personal and professional relationships (McNeill and Weaver, 2010: 4). This echoed the

findings of a study into a Home Office crime reduction scheme where over half the participants suggested that they found the emotional support offered by their mentor most helpful (Lewis *et al.*, 2007: 42). They appreciated being able to talk to someone who was there to listen to them. Höing *et al.* (2015: 2) have suggested that a CoSA with its promotion of human relationships is adept at providing social networks and capital through its use of specialist volunteers. The social support networks within the Primrose CoSAs were fundamental. The volunteers were unable to provide extensive social capital opportunities, but the support they offered was vital to the CoSA process. It was not only the actual support that appeared important, but the fact that it was given within a social relationship. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 on support.

Rehabilitative Treatment and Interventions for Sex Offenders

Treatment and/or interventions are a fundamental part of the management of sex offenders, particularly within the areas of both risk and rehabilitation. Such treatment programmes are relatively new interventions due in part to the difficulty of establishing specific 'sex offender' risks or traits (Philpot, 2011: 35). However, attempts have been made to better understand such individuals, the best known and frequently cited work of sex offender rationale is that of David Finklehor (1984). He stated that certain preconditions are required before most individuals would commit a sexual offence. Individuals needed the capacity to overcome both internal and external "inhibitors" and the ability to overcome any resistance offered by the victim (Philpot, 2011:35). These factors also required certain psychological and sociological facilitators to ensure the individual believed he/she had "permission to abuse" (Philpot, 2011: 35). This has been highlighted as a cognitive distortion model and has had considerable influence on treatment models, particularly in the areas of offender denial and justification (Mann and Shingler, 2006:174).

Treatment for sex offenders can involve psychological and medical (for example, surgical operations and 'chemical castration') interventions (McAlinden, 2007: 63). However, this review will focus on rehabilitative sex offender psychological therapeutic provisions ('talking therapy'). Initially such programmes concentrated on deterring inappropriate sexual thought processes,

but they have since evolved (Brown, 2005, 2010). Marshall *et al.*, (2003: 206) highlighted in their review of sex offender treatment that treatment has gone from basic behavioural programmes to extensive cognitive programmes which explore and address a variety of offending factors. In the UK, Sex Offender Treatment Programmes (SOTP) were introduced to the prison service in 1991 and are now delivered in the community by both probation and accredited third party organisations (Philpot, 2011:41). Such treatment is frequently group orientated and based on a cognitive behavioural model (Brown, 2005). Treatment models are designed to help the individual to recognise the thought processes that enable their offending behaviour and promote avoidance strategies to prevent further offending (Philpot: 2011: 39). Today most treatment programmes include; analysis of the offence (looking at both denial and minimisation), empathy, relapse prevention and life skills/plans (Brown, 2005:116). Treatment programmes specific to those with learning disabilities are discussed further in the following Chapter 3 on the parties.

In her discussion of the merits of a CoSA, McAlinden, (2007: 170) has suggested that a circle could act as either “restorative therapy” or “informal treatment”. As an intervention CoSAs can respond to both RNR and GLM criteria. Until recently, the model has been focused on high risk offenders (Wilson and McWhinnie, 2013:76; Wilson *et al.*, 2010: 50) responding to the criminogenic needs of the core member and tailored to the core members specific requirements (Bellamy and Watson, 2013). CoSAs are also used to further the effectiveness of any programme by supporting the core member’s primary and secondary life goals and his/her formal treatment plan (McCartan *et al.*, 2014: 1).

Many treatment programmes are based on the concepts of RNR, relying heavily on the evaluation of risk. However, the problems previously discussed with risk assessments follow into the treatment programmes, particularly with the categorisation of high, medium and low risk individuals (Brown, 2005:31). The allocation of risk in treatment has considerable significance for sex offenders. For those who are considered high and medium risk sex offender treatment is considered beneficial, but this is not necessarily the case for low risk offenders where it could be “counterproductive” (Ministry of Justice, 2013b: 23). This could be true of a CoSA because of its potential labelling consequences and

possible punitive monitoring and accountability requirements, both of which could cause hostility and have a negative impact. These issues are highlighted in my study and are discussed in Chapter 6 on accountability and 7 on risk. It should also be noted that a recent Ministry of Justice review of prison-based Core SOTPs cast doubt on their effectiveness. Whilst the findings were highlighted as tentative they did suggest that either the Core SOTP did not reduce sexual reoffending as intended, “or that the true impact of the Programme was not detected” (Mews *et al.*, 2017: 4).

There have also been other concerns about basing access to treatment on risk categorisation, particularly in a system that is driven by key performance indicators, such as recidivism. As with other programmes (for example, access to drugs courts (Drug Policy Alliance, 2011)), it could mean that those who are viewed as difficult to treat and less likely to respond to treatment could be excluded or rejected from treatment programmes (Gordon and Nicholaichuk, 1996). Such offenders could, if admitted to treatment, negatively impact upon the statistics for that particular model and service provider, showing it to be less effective due to its disappointing recidivism rates. This may ultimately mean that those who are in most need are excluded from treatment (Gordon and Nicholaichuk, 1996). Programmes which are governed by Payment by Results (PbR), stringent key performance indicators or public and political support may find such groups particularly challenging (Bates *et al.*, 2014). This may become more of an issue with the growing number of third party service providers competing for services in the probation sector as they try to promote and fund their offerings through convincing statistics (Williams and Nash, 2014: 13). Difficulties in providing the appropriate resource for those that need intensive support may also be an issue for CoSAs, particularly the ones which include vulnerable groups with needs that are not easily addressed. For example, this could be true of CoSAs for those who have autism, who have been shown to be resilient to treatment and who need intensive and constant reinforcement with many behavioural treatments (SOTSC-ID, 2010).

Despite the inclusion of the rehabilitative GLM paradigm within the CoSA model, it could still be said that it remains focused on the management of risk. Bellamy and Watson (2013: 25) suggest that the existing traditional cognitive group work within the criminal justice system concentrates on rehabilitation,

whereas a CoSA was in part about “risk management and harm reduction”. However, they indicated that the risk viewpoint within a CoSA, rather than being punitive, ensured a much more bespoke supportive programme. However Thomas *et al.* (2014) in another CoSA study suggested that the use of risk management in the form of accountability and the strengths based approach of support created a degree of conflict and tension. Therefore the final research question explored here is:

How does a CoSA for young people with learning disabilities who pose a risk of exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour respond to the concepts of support and accountability? How are the tensions between these concepts managed?

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the existing CoSA research and how it has evolved from purely recidivism focused studies to include recognition of ‘softer’ social issues such as self-esteem and confidence. This may have been in part because of the involvement of researchers from different countries with differing social, academic and criminal justice experiences and philosophies. It could also be that it is now generally accepted that recidivism despite its quantitative appeal is methodologically difficult to defend. The chapter also explored the three main conceptual areas that influence the CoSA model, offender risk management, restorative justice and rehabilitation, highlighting that there are both popular and political reasons for ensuring the model, particularly in the UK, is considered a risk management model. Throughout this chapter some of the areas which have been explored in the Primrose Project have been flagged, highlighting the relevance of the topics discussed and the complex character of the model within my research.

The next chapter will explore some of the issues surrounding the parties to the CoSA. These parties will be reviewed by reflecting on the literature associated with volunteering and revisiting the complicated topics of learning disabilities and sexually harmful behaviour. This chapter will also compare the parties

involved in the Primrose CoSAs and those in other recent British CoSAs in order to explore any differences and reflect on how this may have affected the management of the Primrose Project.

Chapter 3

Parties involved in the CoSA: Literature, Motivations and Demographics

Introduction

This chapter explores the literature relating to the CoSA participants. It examines volunteering, the influence of community, reasons for volunteering and the part gender and ethnicity play in volunteering. This is followed by an exploration of the core member as a sex offender who has a learning disability looking particularly at the interventions and treatments offered to such a group. Both of these areas are referenced throughout with descriptions of the Primrose Project and the latest UK CoSA studies. A section on the other CoSA parties (co-ordinator and the stakeholders) and how their professional backgrounds influence the model is also included. The comparisons between the parties in the Primrose Project and their counterparts in recent traditional UK CoSAs is scrutinized to highlight influences and differences which may have a potential impact on the Primrose CoSAs.

Volunteers

Volunteers play a vital part in the CoSA model. They provide social interaction (i.e. going for a cup of tea and chat) and offer a link to the wider community.

Importance of Volunteers as Members of the Community

CoSAs place considerable importance upon 'community' particularly through its use of local community volunteers. It is suggested that through this community engagement, via both censure and encouragement, the core member will be able to take his/her place as a fully functioning member of society. This concept of community plays a large role in CoSA theory and was highlighted in the discussion on reintegrative shaming in Chapter 2 (Braithwaite, 1989). It is easy to understand how important such community is when considering small close knit societies and how it can influence the maintenance and prohibition of certain behaviour. Such communities inevitably place emphasis on relationships and the need to maintain these relationships (Bottoms, 2003). Therefore the effectiveness of all the justice models which have a community element is

largely dependent upon the degree of strength and connection between the parties involved. However, for the CoSAs within the Primrose Project, and CoSAs generally, the commonality of the circle participants was, on the surface, limited. They merely lived in a similar geographical area and were therefore able to attend meetings and activities on a regular basis.

Bottoms (2003: 109) questions whether contemporary societies, especially Western societies, have the necessary bonds and cohesion to engender the social need to be part of such a community. This question is equally valid for a CoSA where strong common values need to be present to both start and sustain a circle. Umbriet and Coates (1999) highlight further that modern societies are composed of groups with not only diverse social and economic backgrounds, but also cultural and faith differences, therefore suggesting it may be difficult to recruit a group of individuals with common values. This lack of general community may also have an impact upon the core member, as he/she may not find sufficient commonality to engage. However, Christie (1977) suggests that such community assistance will give those who participate in such enterprises a personal stake in the results. This will further develop feelings of community thereby negating some of the differences. Others have also suggested that the power of community resides in the relationships being established and such relationships having sufficient strength to promote a degree of influence for change (Daly, 2008: 137). Wilson *et al.*, (2008: 30) agree with this sentiment suggesting that a “CoSA is an act of community building.” These relationships or bonds play into the human need to be accepted, ensuring the individual’s behaviour is internally monitored and adjusted to support compliance and maintenance of these bonds (Harris and Maruna, 2008: 545). Bellamy and Watson (2013: 28 and 26) in their study of therapeutic group work within a CoSA, state that a CoSA can provide a community for the core member. This is because the model facilitates pro-social relationships, with a broad range of individuals, allowing the core member to experience societal acceptance and disapproval. This theme of community was something discussed by the Primrose volunteers who believed that the concept had importance for the model. This is discussed in Chapter 5 on support. It could be argued that this sense of community was especially important for the Primrose core members because of their limited community integration. The Primrose

CoSAs did not merely signify acceptance of the core members as a “fellow citizen[s]”, as suggested in other CoSA research, but allowed the core member to participate in an active pro-social community (Thomas *et al.*, 2014: 209). This was a rare and valued experience.

Motivational Reasons for Individuals Volunteering

CoSA volunteers are fundamental to the model. Therefore it is very important to be able to recruit and retain suitable individuals. Volunteering is not necessarily a natural impulse, however, it is argued that it does fulfil certain needs. Clary *et al.* (1998: 1517 - 1518) suggest that volunteering can enable the volunteer to: express values; learn new or practice existing skills (potentially enhancing career prospects); develop social relationships and feelings of self-worth. Einholf (2011: 1094) suggests that there is also a gender bias for volunteering and that “some types of volunteering have strong gender norms”. He highlights that some studies have shown that men and women generally volunteer within different arenas and for different roles. For example, men are much more likely to be involved in physical, practical and sporting roles and women within roles that require more emotional and counselling input. In his attempt to understand the differences between gender volunteering patterns, he suggests that there are three causes for volunteering: motivation, resources and social capital (Einholf, 2011: 1095). His study highlights that motivation (“empathy, religiosity, generative concern, moral obligation and prosocial role identity”) plays a significant role in a woman’s decision to volunteer. However, resource attainment is more likely to influence men (money, education and social capital). Einholf (2011) also argues that whereas women were more motivated to volunteer, men required inducements. This could involve a request from someone within a social network, or participation in an activity associated with a favoured recreational pursuit (Einholf, 2011: 1096). Carpenter and Knowles Myers (2010: 919) considered the impact of image upon volunteering as a fire fighter. They discovered that the special car licence plate given to fire fighters and the visibility of responding to emergency calls were reasons for volunteering. Image, particularly detrimental perceptions, is alluded to in one of the latest CoSA studies (McCartan, 2016). McCartan (2016) states that volunteers often do not tell others about their CoSA volunteering activities. This

is a topic discussed at length by the Primrose volunteers and discussed in Chapter 7 on risk.

Community or social networks play a part in volunteering. Individuals who come into contact with others who volunteer are more likely to volunteer too. It is probably therefore no coincidence that the first CoSAs were inspired by faith groups with their strong social bonds. Volunteering for such a model may be seen as a practical method of expressing religious beliefs (Souza and Dhami, 2008: 49). The religious links with CoSAs can also be seen through the concept of rehabilitation, this concept of helping the wayward to reform was seen as spiritually consistent with being a good Christian (Cullen and Gendreau, 2000: 114). It has also been suggested that restorative justice interventions which embrace the participant's faith may have greater success as they build on pre-existing beliefs and a sense of community (Armour *et al*, 2008).

This common background/ belief system promotes not only the awareness of such schemes, but also provides social insulation. Others within their social network are less likely to discourage or condemn their choice of activities (Wilson, 2012: 190). Those with large social networks are more likely to volunteer as their extensive social capital provides them with a social buffer to ensure their decision will be supported by at least some of their social counterparts (Forbes and Zampelli, 2014: 231). This is important for the CoSA programme as the attitudes that society generally has towards those who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour and those who associate with them is often hostile. This is further discussed in Chapter 7 on risk.

In many of the CoSA studies detailed in Chapter 2, volunteer motivation was a common research theme. In an early Canadian study, Cesaroni (2001) found that the volunteer's motivations for joining a circle were connected to their faith beliefs and their interest in benefiting the community. These benefits included promoting a safer community and enhancing the core member's reintegration prospects. These motivations are classed as 'outward' rather than 'inward' motivations. Inward motivations were those which focused on personal benefits for the volunteer (for example, enhanced employment benefits) (Bellamy and Watson, 2013). In the Wilson *et al*. (2007a) study, the volunteer's motivational rationale had changed slightly, volunteers were still motivated by perceptions of

benefiting the community ('outward'), but this was no longer as heavily connected to their faith beliefs.

To explore Primrose volunteer characteristics the following Primrose Circle Diagrams are included below in Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5. These diagrams detail certain demographic factors of the parties (including motivations) and enable comparison with other UK studies. The Primrose core members have been given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. Figure 1 below is a key to the circle diagrams. The volunteer symbols are divided into green (female) and blue (male) and detail the volunteer's age, ethnicity, sex, occupation (within particular areas), motivation and any other pertinent factors. The core member's symbol (orange circle) details their pseudonym, age (at the start of the circle) and ethnicity.

Figure 1 - Key to the Primrose Circle Diagrams

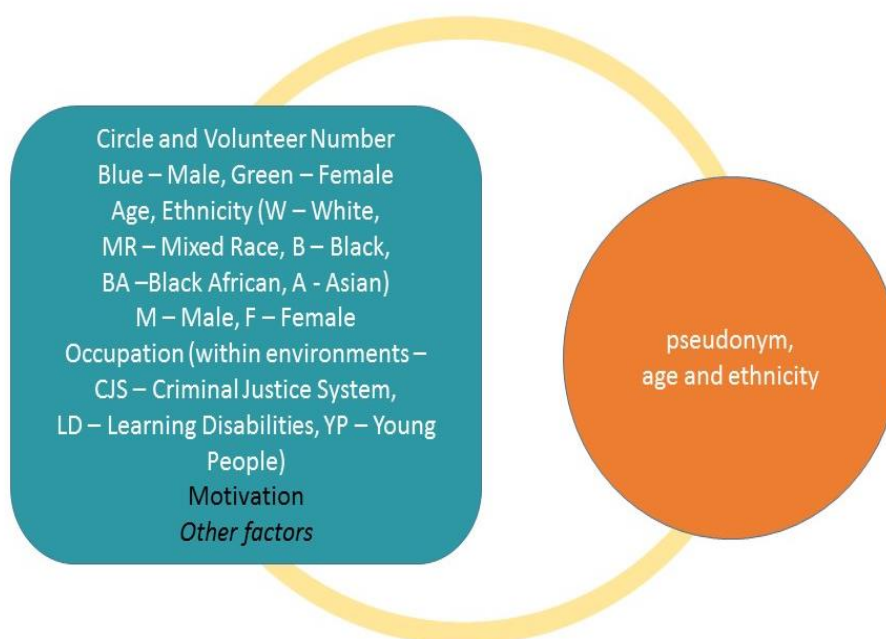


Figure 2 Primrose Circle 1 (February 2013 – March 2015)

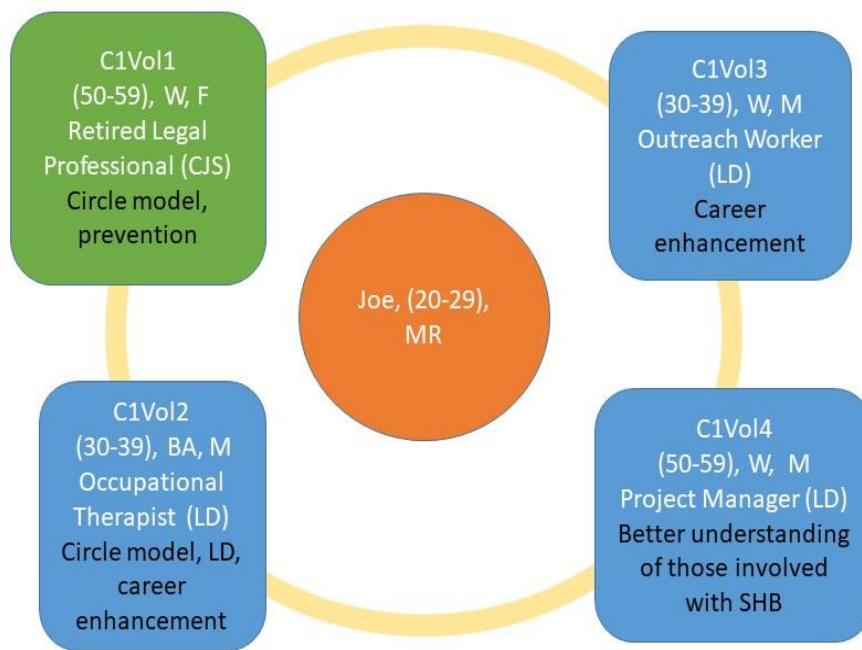


Figure 3 - Primrose Circle 2 (April 2013 – December 2014)

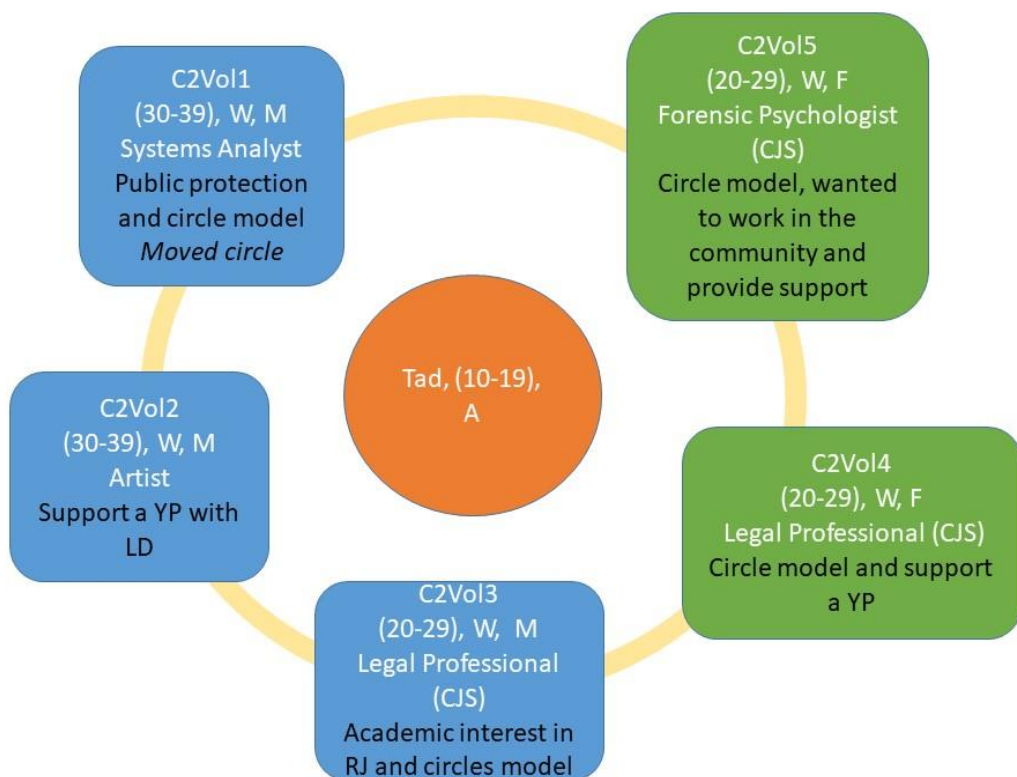


Figure 4 - Primrose Circle 3 (July 2013 – September 2015)

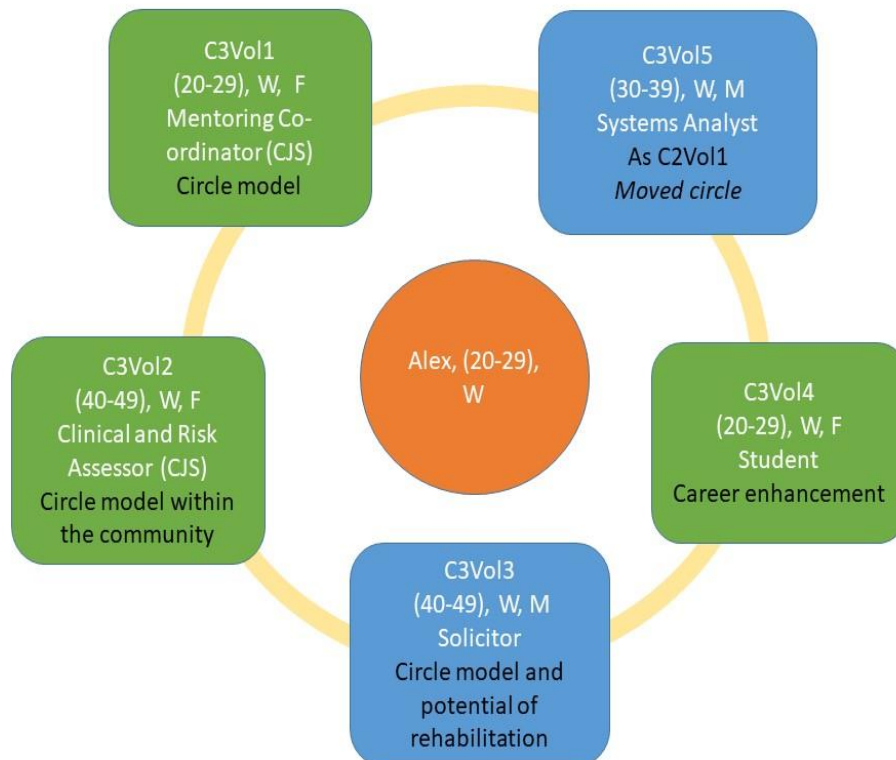
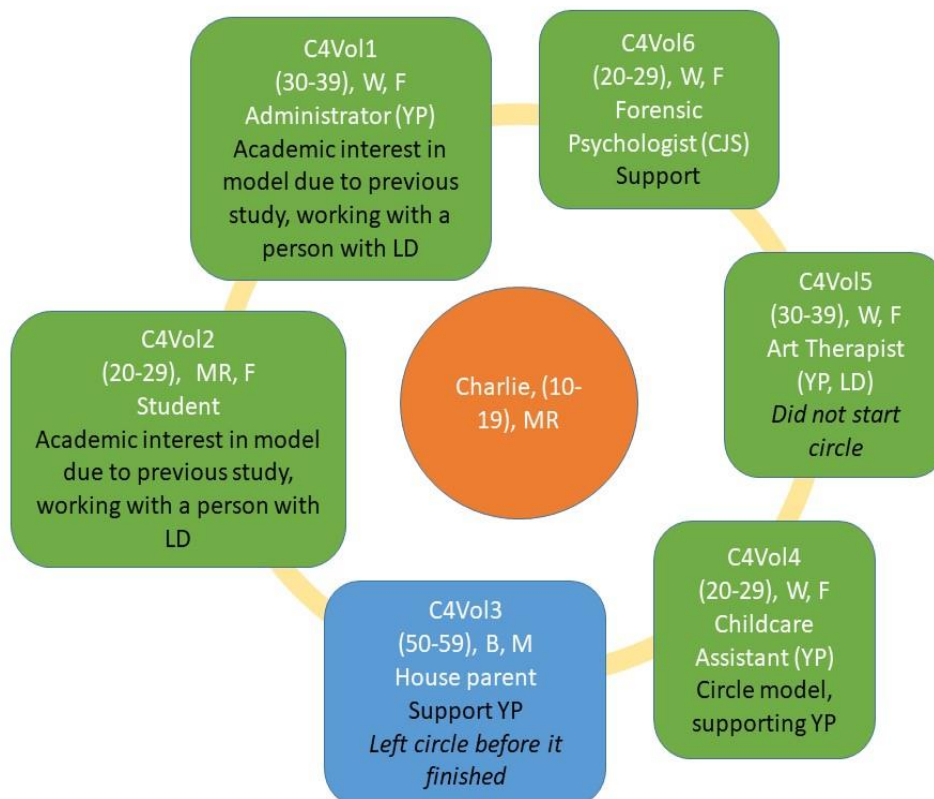


Figure 5 - Primrose Circle 4 (October, 2013 – December 2014)



Motivation for CoSA volunteering has been explored in several UK studies (Armstrong and Wills, 2014; Banks *et al.*, 2015; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). In most CoSA studies, the majority of the volunteers were perceived to have 'outward' motivations, although this did seem to depend upon the age of the volunteer. Thomas *et al.* (2014) noted that those who initially highlighted 'outward' motivations tended to be older volunteers whose decision had been influenced by their professional or volunteering backgrounds. Thomas *et al.* (2014) also suggested the nature of the volunteer's motivation could change at points in the circle. At the beginning volunteers viewed their motivations as 'inward', but by the end their motivations changed as they began to appreciate the merits of a circle. Banks *et al.* (2015) also suggested that those who had 'outward' motivations were more likely to stay the course of the circle and volunteer for another circle.

The CoSA model relies on those within the circle developing strong and productive relationships. It is therefore important to try and understand the issues which draw, and continue to connect, those involved to the circle. As part of the Primrose Project's volunteer vetting process, the volunteer's motives for participating in the programme were scrutinised and factors such as the core member's safety, the volunteer's emotional wellbeing and shared outcome objectives, were considered. As shown in Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5, 15 of the Primrose volunteers gave various 'outward' motivational reasons for joining, two gave 'inward' (career enhancement) reasons and one highlighted both 'inward' and 'outward' reasons for volunteering for the programme. Motivational details were not recorded for one volunteer and one volunteer (C2Vol1/C3Vol5) was in two circles therefore only recorded once. This high number of 'outward' motivations is perhaps why only two Primrose volunteers left their circle before formal closure.

Höing *et al.* (2016a) stated that volunteer motivation was also key in preventing volunteer 'burnout'. Those with realistic volunteer motivation and expectations were likely to be more resilient. Protection could also be further enhanced by the volunteers own personal characteristics (high self-esteem and self-efficacy) and support from family and friends (Höing *et al.*, 2016a: 381). This therefore suggests that volunteer screening should not only assess volunteer attitudes and attributes, but also their social and family connections. These are issues

discussed in my study, in particular volunteer expectations. The subject of the volunteers moderating their expectations is something discussed in Chapter 5 on support.

It is necessary when implementing a CoSA to understand why different genders choose to volunteer as the inclusion of different gendered volunteers could have an impact upon the effectiveness of the circle. It could be important to include a number of male volunteers, especially when endeavouring to connect with a young male core member. Whilst there appears to be no research on how the gender of a circle volunteer impacts upon the circle, there are studies relating to mentoring projects which suggest that young men benefit from having male mentors (Spencer, 2007; Garraway and Pistrang, 2010). Spencer (2007: 187) found in her research into mentoring programmes that the gender was important. The emotional relationship that developed between a male mentor and mentee offered the mentee a safe environment in which to explore his masculinity in a positive and non-judgemental way. These programmes enabled mentees to discuss problems thereby ensuring their feelings of anger were contained. These discussions often resulted in the formulation of strategies to assist in the management of emotions and provided an outlet for frustrations. The Garraway and Pistrang (2010: 728) study highlighted that it was not only gender that was important, but also similar ethnic backgrounds. This provided a greater potential for emotional connection through similar life experiences. Both studies suggested that such close supportive relationships assisted young mentees in coping with emotional problems that may have put them at risk of offending.

The above Primrose CoSA diagrams in Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 show that of the 20 Primrose volunteers there were 11 women and 8 men (C2Vol1/C3Vol5 was only counted once although he appears twice in both Figures 3 and 4). This high ratio of men is very rare. Most of the UK CoSA research projects report that the majority of volunteers are women (Kerr *et al.*, 2017; McCartan, 2014). In the three recent UK CoSA research projects they reported a female majority. In the Thomas *et al.* (2014) study, they highlighted a 75% female and 25% male split. In the Banks *et al.* (2015) study, where they looked at the demographics of the 120 volunteers, 80% were female and 20% were male. Finally in the McCartan (2016) research there was approximately a 3:1 female majority.

Gender and its impact upon the circle are discussed in my study in Chapter 6 on accountability.

Whilst the following demographics were not explicitly discussed in the Primrose Project, they are highlighted here as they will have had an impact upon the respective circles. The use of volunteer age ranges in most studies makes age comparison problematic. However, approximations and age ranges can show some potential differences. In the Primrose Project the majority of the volunteers were aged between 26 and 46 (with an approximate average of 36). In two of the three recent UK CoSA studies the majority of the volunteers were aged between 22 and 30 (McCartan, 2016) and 18 and 25 (Banks *et al.*, 2015), however, in the third study the majority of the volunteers were between 56 and 65 (with an approximate average age of 48 years) (Thomas *et al.*, 2014). As has been suggested ethnicity may play a part in the relational development between the parties. In the Primrose Project three of the 20 volunteers (approximately 20%) were non-white British. This was a higher percentage of non-white British volunteers than was reported in the other two studies that reported this demographic (Banks *et al.*, 2015; 15% non-white British: McCartan, 2016; 58 white British and four non-white British). This therefore makes the Primrose volunteers slightly more ethnically diverse than those in traditional CoSAs.

Core Members

Volunteers are one key component of the CoSA and the other is the individual that is at the centre of the circle, the core member. Having already briefly explored the definitions of learning disabilities and sexually harmful behaviour in Chapter 1, the next section will examine how those with learning disabilities navigate and interact with the criminal justice system.

The Criminal Justice System - Sexually Harmful Behaviour and Learning Disabilities

As was stated in Chapter 1, there is no universal definition of learning/intellectual disability. When the Bradley Report (2009:19) considered

those with learning disabilities within the criminal justice system, it was acknowledged that even professionals had problems defining distinctions between learning disability, borderline learning disability and learning difficulty. They also recognised that there was additional confusion between learning disabilities and mental health problems and that a distinction needed to be drawn between the two groups. The Bradley Report (2009) further stated that due to this inability to distinguish between certain groups it was difficult to quantify how many individuals with learning disabilities had committed harmful acts and/or become involved with the criminal justice system.

The difficulty with understanding the definition and the complexity of the group often causes problems. As respected author Vizard (2014: 71) points out from her work with those with learning disabilities, there is a tendency by professionals, both within and outside the criminal justice system, to overlook such groups. This ignorance is promoted by the fact that if an individual with a learning disability does become involved in the criminal justice system and it is apparent that they are unable to understand or cope with the process, they may be diverted out of the system (Jones, 2007: 726). Therefore promoting the idea that only those with sufficient mental capacity are involved with the criminal justice system. However, this is incorrect as recognition of learning disabilities often depends upon assessment and those professionals involved having the time and experience to notice that the individual lacks the required understanding. Another reason why those with learning disabilities do not become involved with the criminal justice system is that carers may ignore harmful situations. This is because of a perception of a lack of understanding, culpability or malicious intent on the part of the individual with the learning disability (Curren, 2009: 90). Furthermore, carers often become desensitised to offending on the part of their patients/family member and may be overprotective, resulting in underreporting (Jones, 2007: 725).

This lack of reporting and prosecution has led some to suggest that any statements as to prevalence of offending behaviour among those with learning disabilities would be difficult (Simpson and Hogg, 2001a and b). However, despite this reluctance to draw any conclusions in respect of offending and therefore sexually harmful behaviour (Lindsay, 2002), Simpson and Hogg (2001a:394) suggested that there may be an exception. They stated that there

was some indication that those with a borderline IQ range may be more predisposed to exhibit sexually harmful behaviours than others. Fyson (2007 a and b) also suggested that there appeared to be evidence that young people who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour are over represented by those who have a learning disability.

The lack of certainty as to whether those who have learning disabilities are more likely to exhibit sexually harmful behaviour is not merely about criminal justice statistics, but may also reflect possible reasons why they are more likely to exhibit such behaviour. Fyson (2007 a and b) found in her study of 26 'special schools' (schools that catered either primarily or solely for those with learning disabilities) all but three stated they had an issue with their student's sexually harmful behaviour. However, the schools endeavoured to manage this issue internally. She felt that the reporting, or lack of reporting, of this problem was due to constant exposure, therefore promoting a degree of desensitisation. She also suggested that the schools dealt with the problem as a behavioural rather than cognitive issue which further distorted the problem. An example of such behavioural adjustments is detailed below in the discussion of "Counterfeit Deviance" (Hingsburger, Griffiths and Quinsey, 1991).

Simpson and Hogg (2001b) also suggest that concentrating on behavioural issues and excluding or downplaying other factors is a concern with research in this area. They suggested that recognition should be given to the fact that the individual "is the outcome of complex and multifarious social processes" (Simpson and Hogg, 2001b: 397). Vizard (2014:69) confirmed this by highlighting that young people with learning disabilities who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour are likely to come from disadvantaged backgrounds and have often been abused and neglected. It has been further suggested that certain traumas and experiences have the potential to inhibit normal child development and if experienced in conjunction with attachment problems, there is a heightened possibility of developing behaviours which would be considered sexually harmful (Pratt, 2013:37-8).

Other suggested reasons for possible increased occurrences of sexually harmful behaviour in both young people and adults with learning disabilities have been: increased impulsivity; a limited capacity to plan or deceive and a lack of sophistication (Craig *et al.*, 2006:370; Wilcox, 2004). Wilson *et al.* (2015:

89) also highlight that individuals with learning disabilities often have difficulty in discerning rules of social interaction and may experience problems understanding age and consent. In a Sex Offender Treatment Services Collaborative – Intellectual Disabilities (SOTSEC-ID) (2010: 538) article, they state that there were a number of contributing factors to those with learning disabilities exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour. These included: a limited number of occasions they have of expressing appropriate sexual responses; a lack of understanding of what constituted illegal behaviour and the reliance on relationships with children or young people due to intellectual parity.

All of the above issues have been highlighted by Hingsburger, *et al.*, (1991) in their discussion of “Counterfeit Deviance”. They stated that sexually harmful behaviour may be exhibited due to certain adaptive factors rather than as a consequence of paraphilia. Such behaviour may be a result of adjusting their conduct in response to their circumstances. An example given of such actions by Griffiths *et al.*, (2013) was a public display of sexual behaviour (masturbation) to avoid being caught in their care facility, where they have little privacy or freedom and sexual behaviour is prohibited. Counterfeit deviance not only has importance when considering whether an individual warrants the label of ‘sex offender’, but is important when responding to sexually harmful behaviour and considering what interventions would be appropriate. Griffiths *et al.* (2013) also reaffirm the sentiments of the above researchers who indicated that understanding context is vital. This is not only when completing assessments and interventions, but also for policy makers, as those with learning disabilities often live their lives surrounded by policies and protocols (Griffiths *et al.*, 2013: 472).

Primrose Circle Core Members

Like many other such young people in the criminal justice system the Primrose core members have been both victimised and been victims, undergone trauma and experienced family difficulties (Porteous *et al.*, 2015). Therefore they may have developed certain ‘inappropriate’ adaptive behaviours. This is highlighted in the Chapter 7 on risk when considering Charlie’s response to his worries about being taken into care. For reasons of confidentiality this thesis will not

extensively detail the Primrose core members' backgrounds, but the following are some common factors shared by this group. All the core members had a diagnosed learning disability, exhibited some form of sexually harmful behaviour, been the victim of abuse or trauma (sexual and/or physical) and experienced family breakdown. Several had been in and out of care as a child and had on-going mental and physical health problems. Furthermore, all the core members had economically deprived backgrounds to the extent that either they or their family relied on state benefits.

The above highlights some of the core members' issues and as can be seen, there is a degree of similarity in their circumstances and experiences. Some of these experiences may have been shared by core members in other projects, but there appears to be several distinctions with the Primrose core members. The first and most obvious difference is that all the Primrose core members have been diagnosed as having a learning disability. The second is that only one had been prosecuted for a sexual offence and had received some form of sex offender treatment. Other differences were their ages and ethnicities. In traditional CoSA studies the core members are a lot older with average ages ranging from 37 years (Banks *et al.*, 2015), 46 years (Warwick, 2014), 43 years (Thomas *et al.*, 2014) and 48 years (Bates *et al.*, 2014:868). The Primrose core members were much younger. This is interesting as the effectiveness of the model arguably requires a degree of maturity and ability to reflect. It is important to recognise this when comparisons between existing studies are made and particularly when considering the level of support which was required by the Primrose core members. The need to appreciate the developmental and cognitive differences between young people and adults and therefore not treating young people as mini adults has frequently been highlighted (Caldwell, 2010). Furthermore, it is also important to appreciate that the complexities of theoretical concepts such as risk management and accountability are likely to be difficult for the Primrose core members to fully understand. This is examined further in Chapters 6 and 7 on accountability and risk.

In the recent UK CoSA studies detailed in Chapter 2, only one study reported having a non-white British core member, whereas in the Primrose Project two of the core members were mixed race and one was Asian. Banks *et al.* (2015) suggest that both the age and ethnicity of core members in their study requires

further investigation. However, a suggested explanation for the lack of younger, non-white British core members is that these groups had better support mechanisms. This meant that they were less likely to fit the criteria for CoSA allocation. This assumption of readily available support may have been applicable for the previous studies, but is questionable in the Primrose Project. It would also be pertinent to question the nature of support being offered, particularly from professional bodies. These issues are highlighted and discussed in Chapter 5 on support.

Learning Disability and Treatment/Intervention for Sexually Harmful Behaviour

Like programmes for young people generally, programmes for those with learning disabilities have largely been adapted from adult male models. Many have included the incorporation of the Good, Lives (adult), Way (adolescent), Model which endeavours to show that there are many life choices and some are more positive than others. This model also highlights how negative choices (hurting others) can be detrimental to the individual's chance of achieving a 'good life' (Vizard, 2014: 73). Other models such as the pathway/self-regulation programmes which consider relapse prevention have been adapted for those with learning disabilities. Whilst these treatment programmes remain cognitively focused they incorporate reference to historical factors which relate to the offending behaviour (Keeling and Rose, 2012: 31). Many programmes utilise the traditional components of treatment/interventions, for example, enhancing victim empathy and challenging denial. This suggests that such cognitive-behavioural therapies (CBT) can be applied to those with learning disabilities (Craig *et al.*, 2006: 371-2). However, it was emphasised that all approaches should be adapted to the individual and his/her intellectual capabilities, with constant re-evaluation as to their suitability. This is because individuals with learning disabilities have such complex and varying cognitive abilities and backgrounds that certain treatments may be unsuitable (Wilson and Prescott, 2014).

Any treatment for those with learning disabilities should be specially adapted for the individual's particular needs, with consideration of issues such as, "limited socialisation, impulsivity, poor social learning skills, low self-esteem and lack of

educational and occupational skills” (Jones, 2007: 729). Treatment programmes include a greater use of activities, such as role play (Craig *et al.*, 2006). These strategies utilise abstract concepts which enable the individual to depersonalise the abusive behaviour therefore enabling him/her to better manage issues of shame (Vizard, 2014:73). There is also a greater concentration on areas such as sex education, and specialist educational programmes have been designed (Craig *et al.*, 2006). These approaches do not focus on verbal discourse, but concentrate on more imaginative interactive techniques (Vizard, 2014: 74). Any new skills taught need to be disseminated through visual methods and regularly practised (Craig *et al.*, 2006: 386). Such adapted programmes can still utilise the traditional group therapy format. Hayes *et al.*, (2007) interviewed a group of men with learning disabilities who had completed a one year group CBT programme for their sexually harmful behaviour. The majority of the men interviewed stated that the group nature of the treatment had facilitated social interaction. This was stimulating and left them feeling valued and acknowledged. However, they did state that one of the most difficult things about the therapy was having to talk about their offence in front of others. All of the above challenges and many of the strategies were experienced within the Primrose Project and are discussed in Chapter 6 on accountability.

Changes in treatment programmes to facilitate the needs of the individual's learning disabilities means that programmes are longer. The more effective courses run over an extended period and it was only after 12-18 months that real changes were observed (Lindsay *et al.*, 2011: 367). Vizard (2014: 74) noted that two years was probably an appropriate period for such programmes, so that themes could be revised and learnt behaviours could be practiced. This extension of time has been highlighted as necessary in the Primrose CoSAs and is universally acknowledged in other 'adapted' circles. This, however, does have cost implications which is difficult to manage when endeavouring to offer a service with financial boundaries.

As with other treatment provisions, there should be recognition of the individual's life experiences which would inevitably be different to that of non-disabled individuals, especially as they were more likely to have been a victim of abuse and bullying (Beadle-Brown, *et al.*, 2014). This may mean the therapist needs to spend more time building a relationship in order to foster a feeling of

trust. Those who have a learning disability may have had difficult relationships with professionals. They may have felt misunderstood or looked down upon in the past (Wilson and Prescott, 2014: 140). This was the case for the Primrose core members. Many volunteers voiced their impression of previous and existing negative professional relationships for their core members and is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 on support and accountability.

Craig *et al.* (2006) note that treatment programmes for those with learning disabilities produced both socialization improvements and potential reoffending reductions, although they suggested that such reductions may be illusory due to the continuing extensive care led supervision required for these individuals and the high acceptance from care staff of harmful behaviour. Nevertheless, it was noted that there were improvements in areas such as sexual knowledge and anatomy following an intervention. They had also developed certain advantageous soft skills (making friendships, thoughtfulness, group interaction, sharing and co-operation, manners, following rules, apologising and controlling impulses) all of which were felt to be valuable (Craig *et al.*, 2006: 385).

However, despite the success of these programmes, it could be argued that they merely offered something that was better than nothing. This was alluded to in later research when it was stated that there was a need to develop a programme specifically for those with learning disabilities with specially designed materials and manuals (Craig *et al.*, 2012: 16). Murphy (ND) highlights the lack of specific assessments and treatments for young people in her review of services available for those with learning disabilities within the criminal justice system. She highlighted that specialist services for young people with learning disabilities would promote public safety, curtail extended prison or hospital confinements and prevent the use of excessive and inappropriate medication.

Therefore, a CoSA with its benefits of adaptability may redress some of the problems within existing treatment. On the other hand it can equally be said it is a model designed for non-disabled, high risk, adult offenders, therefore unsuitable for low risk young people with learning disabilities. The CoSA utilises the advantages of community based interventions which have the potential of exploiting the extended social networks and social capital of the volunteers (Cullen, 1994). However, it should also be recognised that this programme utilises unpaid non-professionals in specialised quasi-probation/therapy related

roles which may or may not be appropriate. This is particularly pertinent as the Primrose core members have both learning disabilities and complex backgrounds. The fact that a CoSA is integral to the criminal justice system and set within a risk management framework must raise questions as to whether the model is capable of offering the requisite amount of flexibility to support such a vulnerable group.

The Professionals

The Co-ordinators

The CoSA co-ordinator is responsible for the day to day management of the circle. He/she liaises with the stakeholders on referral, recruits the core members and volunteers, introduces the core members to the volunteers, supports the volunteers and assists with the management of the day to day issues of the circle. He/she also acts as a communication conduit between the stakeholders and the circle ensuring that any issues of concern are passed on to the requisite authorities.

The role of CoSA co-ordinator is worthy of discussion when considering the parties in a CoSA. Traditional UK CoSA co-ordinators have usually either worked for the probation service, or were still working for the probation service, but had been seconded to the circle to work as a co-ordinator on a CoSA project (Banks *et al.*, 2015; Bates, *et. al.*, 2014; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). This link between probation and the CoSA co-ordinator has been recognised as a benefit in some studies, adding credibility to the administration and running of the CoSA (Banks *et al.*, 2015). The elevated credibility is due, in part, to the stakeholder's belief that a trained criminal justice professional can ensure the circle manages the continuing risk of the core member. The connection to the probation service also means that core member referrals are relatively seamless as the personnel involved share not merely a common philosophy, but also in the case of seconded co-ordinators, access to records (Banks *et al.*, 2015). Therefore for many stakeholders, it could be argued that they were merely passing the core member to another arm of the criminal justice system.

Primrose Co-ordinators

Throughout the Primrose Project, there were three co-ordinators all of whom influenced the nature and devolvement of the CoSA. They have been given pseudonyms for the purpose of my study. The first co-ordinator (Laura) was a psychologist for young people and part of the Primrose management team. She was instrumental in setting up the model and the initial training, but had little to do with the day to day management of the Primrose CoSA programme. Her background was clinical and she was very interested in the research and development possibilities of a 'therapeutic' CoSA model.

The second co-ordinator (Helen) was appointed to manage the CoSA programme when Laura was reassigned to a more clinical role. She was familiar with MAPPA through her previous role as an Independent Domestic Violence Advisor. She had also worked for several charities as a project/service manager and had once been a circle volunteer. Her interest in the CoSA project came largely from her political beliefs that the prison system was ineffective and immoral and her work with domestic violence survivors. She was particularly drawn to the CoSA promise of 'no more victims'. She managed Circle 1 and Circles 2 and 3 (initial stages).

The third co-ordinator (Jackie) was employed when Helen reduced her working hours. Jackie did have criminal justice experience, but had not worked closely with the probation service. The reasons given for her appointment were "*she was good with people, reflective and passionate about the project*" (Helen). She believed strongly in the model and had been a CoSA volunteer. She managed Circles 2 and 3 (final stages) and Circle 4.

All of these women were instrumental in shaping the Primrose CoSAs, supporting both the core members and the volunteers. None of them had been employed by the probation service and did not feel any particular allegiance to this group. Their roles are discussed throughout Chapters 5, 6 and 7 on the research analysis.

The Stakeholders

The 'stakeholders' for the Primrose Project were in the main different to those in traditional UK CoSAs. Traditional stakeholders tended to be criminal justice professionals, particularly from the police and probation services. Stakeholders are usually involved in CoSAs in several ways, through the original referral (although there are a limited number of self-referrals (Bates *et al.*, 2014)) and continuing management of the core member. However, only one of the Primrose core members was referred to the project via the traditional MAPPA route. The other three Primrose core members were referred by either social or educational services. The Primrose management team had extensive existing relationships with local social and educational services and two of the four core members were known to the Primrose management team. This was due to their involvement in previous non-CoSA related services. This meant that the Primrose stakeholders or their colleagues had historic relationships with the Primrose management team.

It would appear that existing relationships had a considerable influence upon both traditional and Primrose Project CoSAs. In an evaluation study of the US CoSAs one of their key findings was that it was vital to develop "close and enduring working relationships" with referring stakeholders to ensure programme viability (Elliott *et al.*, 2013: 63). I would also argue that stakeholder professional philosophies have an impact on the referral and management of the CoSA. Therefore, stakeholders of traditional CoSAs ensure that risk management is central to the CoSA by promoting the use of criminal justice trained co-ordinators. However, whilst the Primrose Project stakeholders may have been motivated by certain risk management factors, their professional backgrounds ensured other factors were also considered. This change in stakeholder philosophy may have facilitated greater freedom within the Primrose CoSAs to be more creative with accountability and risk management.

Conclusion

The CoSA model in the UK continues to expand. This expansion includes branching out into CoSAs for specific groups, for example, young people or those with learning disabilities or mental health problems (Circles South West,

2016). Interestingly, McCartan (2016: 18) identified just under a third of the core members in his study as having a disability. However, as there was no distinction between types of disability, both physical and learning disabilities were grouped together. This suggests a continuing confusion about the diverse and complex nature of disabilities. Circles in these areas would have to be bespoke and responsive to the needs and abilities of the core members. Differences would not be limited to the core members, other professionals outside of the criminal justice system would potentially be involved. Therefore this may suggest that these CoSAs would be better placed in a social care environment rather than integral to the criminal justice system (McCartan, 2016). Social care agencies may be better placed to appreciate the core members complicated needs and complex backgrounds and therefore produce a more effective and appropriate solution.

The next chapter explains the methodology used to explore the three research questions in this thesis.

Chapter Four

Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes my research journey in the examination and exploration of the Primrose Project. To fully examine the Primrose Project in depth, I exploited a qualitative case study method to provide rich and analytical details (Thomas, 2011: 23). The main data collection method employed in this study was a series of volunteer focus groups, which provided a real time perspective of the developing model. This was supported by semi-structured interviews, case file analysis and observations captured in a field diary. This produced copious and diverse data which facilitated an enhanced understanding of the processes and parties, and assisted in the verification of emerging perceptions and themes. Also detailed is a discussion of the complexities and difficulties experienced due to the inclusion of the core members within my study. The chapter will conclude with an examination of my reflective thoughts and the challenges of being a participant observer.

Research Design

My study explores the use of the UK CoSA model with a group of young/adolescent males who have learning disabilities, have previously exhibited sexually harmful behaviour and have been assessed as posing a continuing risk of repeating this behaviour. Within my study there were four pilot CoSAs which ran for a three year period (January, 2013 – December, 2015). These CoSAs included 20 volunteers, four core members and three co-ordinators (the Primrose Project). The realities of the project and my own epistemological and ontological views resulted in a series of qualitative case studies. These case studies captured the thoughts and experiences of those involved with the Primrose Project. A qualitative approach was used to thematically analyse the data collected from focus groups, interviews, case files and observational material. It was evident at this early stage that the study would encompass many complex areas, therefore I utilised a framework exploiting multi-disciplinary reference material from, criminology, sociology, psychology and law. This material would ensure a greater understanding of the

concepts and the findings would produce contributions in all fields by way of exploring policy and practice of these overarching areas. The backgrounds and abilities of the Primrose core members further prompted the use of qualitative case studies in order to generate, collect and examine difficult issues which could have been lost in a deductive quantitative study (Bryman, 2016).

This is one of the first studies that considers the CoSA model's application to young/adolescent males with learning disabilities and reflects the difficulty such a group has in being adequately recognised and represented. Therefore the aim of this thesis is to examine how the CoSA model has been used with and adapted for young/adolescent core members with learning disabilities. To support this aim and examine how the CoSA model was used in the Primrose Project the following research questions were employed:

How has the CoSA model been adapted to work with a group of young people with learning disabilities who pose a risk of exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour?

How does this type of CoSA, one for young people with learning disabilities who have exhibited sexually harmful behaviour, fit within the risk management paradigm?

How does a CoSA for young people with learning disabilities who pose a risk of exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour respond to the concepts of support and accountability? How are the tensions between these concepts managed?

A Qualitative Research Strategy

From the outset I realised that my study would be a relatively small study as it was a pilot programme for a very particular group of individuals (young people with learning disabilities who had exhibited, and continued to potentially pose a risk of exhibiting, sexually harmful behaviour). The limited numbers and my own

particular study preference meant that a qualitative research design was the obvious choice of research strategy (Bryman, 2016). A qualitative study, one that is based on words, would help me develop an understanding of the reasons behind actions and thought processes. It would promote discussion of process evolution and showcase the voices of those within the Primrose Project (Silverman, 2013: 6). Qualitative research is also a fundamental research method for many CoSA studies, used for eliciting participant's opinions and feelings (Armstrong *et al*, 2008; Armstrong and Wills, 2014; Banks *et al*, 2015; Bellamy and Watson, 2013; Clarke, 2011; Fox, 2015 and 2016; Hannem, 2013; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008; Höing *et al.*, 2015; McCartan, 2016; Northcutt Bohmert *et al.*, 2016; Thomas *et al.*, 2014)

As suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2013: 6) "qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible." This is perhaps particularly pertinent for a study that involves those with learning disabilities. There was little research on interventions for those with learning disabilities who had exhibited sexually harmful behaviour and even less on the use of CoSAs for this group. Consequently, I did not start this research project with any established theories or hypothesis. This inductive approach allowed me to start my research using generalised topics. Therefore I had a considerable freedom to explore themes and their interaction with those within my study (Bryman, 2016). This fits with Mason's (2002: 24) statement that "qualitative research is characteristically exploratory, fluid and flexible, data-driven and context-sensitive". The fact that my study was to be set in the field and was likely to produce an intricate picture about complex issues again lends itself to a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013: 46; Robson, 2011). However, it is this flexibility and fluidity that gives rise to criticism of qualitative research, soliciting questions about reliability, transferability and objectivity (Gray, 2014). I would argue a greater understanding of the issues connected to this particular research area could only be achieved through a qualitative inquiry, where an individual's unfettered thoughts and opinions were sought. However, I acknowledge that objectivity and certainty are legitimate concerns as I, like any other researcher, will have applied my own understandings and preconceptions when working with the parties and data generated in my research (Denscombe, 2010b). There were several factors that may have influenced my interaction

with the data. Firstly, I was involved in the Primrose Project in several different capacities: PhD student, in-house researcher (for which I received a nominal bursary) and observer. Secondly, I have and continue to work on a help-line for survivors of sexually harmful behaviour. Finally, I consider the existing criminal justice processes and practices with respect to sexually harmful behaviour ineffective, damaging and incapable of addressing the problem.

It is also acknowledged that I will not be the only one to take my previous experiences and personal perceptions into the project. All those involved in the Primrose Project will have differing social constructions depending on his/her own personal experiences (Cresswell, 2013; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Thomas, 2011). There will be no shared objective or standard understanding of events or circumstances. Consequently, to better understand an individual's beliefs I endeavoured to either enter a dialogue with him/her or have access to his/her words via text. Examination of the beliefs and understandings of those involved with the Primrose Project, in their own words and in conjunction with others they worked with, facilitated greater insight and clarity when interrogating the data. However, despite endeavouring to capture dialogue from all those within the Primrose Project I acknowledge, as will be more fully described later in this chapter, that I had limited access to the core member's own words. I had to rely heavily on case file notes and the repetition of the core member's words by others. Therefore such dialogue will have gone through a series of filters and may not be completely accurate.

A Case Study Approach

The case study approach was an integral part of my research design. This was a common-sense conclusion to the question of research approach because of the size of the study and the fact that each CoSA was capable of being a 'case'. Each CoSA has a distinct set of processes and interactions that could be encapsulated, examined and evaluated. I have described the Primrose CoSA lifecycle at the end of this section to illustrate the contained nature of the CoSA and Appendix 2 provides a diagrammatical representation of a circle lifecycle.

The suitability of this research method was further confirmed after establishing the aims and questions of my thesis. Such an approach facilitated the research

questions which are all prefaced with “how” (Yin, 2014: 9). The clear structure of the CoSA recommended that the most appropriate research strategy would be an “instrumental case study” (Stake, 1995:3). Instrumental because the case would be used to investigate a particular issue (Stake, 2000:437). The issue being whether the CoSA model, set within a risk management framework, could be used with or adapted for young people with learning disabilities.

Each case commenced at the point of core member referral (or first focus group, whichever was the earlier) and finished just after formal closure of the CoSA (the last focus group). This created an organic unit of analysis (Baxter and Jack, 2008). The approximate lifecycle of each circle was: 25 months for Circle 1; 20 months for Circle 2; 26 months for Circle 3 and 14 months for Circle 4 (the dates for these milestones are listed in Figure 6 below). My study was limited to those CoSAs initiated within a 12 month period. This ensured sufficient time to see a CoSA through from beginning to end and manage the data produced by each case.

Figure 6 - Primrose CoSA Lifecycles

	Referral Date or First Focus Group (whichever is the earlier date)	Final Focus Group Date
Circle 1	03/02/2013	05/03/2015
Circle 2	26/04/2013	15/12/2014
Circle 3	01/07/2013	22/09/2015
Circle 4	01/10/2013	03/12/2014

My study utilised several cases which delivered a better understanding of the process and its impact, rather than an appreciation of the effects of one particular CoSA (Creswell, 2013: 99). Significant and minor events emerging over the life of the circle and participant perspectives were secured reflecting issues and cross case phenomena (Creswell, 2013: 101). All the cases were connected to an exceptional set of circumstances in which an existing criminal justice model was being piloted and adapted for a particular group of individuals. This therefore ensured a particular degree of uniqueness and interest (Stake, 1995:1). Despite the benefits of using several case studies, it could be suggested that this expansion diluted the analysis. However, by

limiting the study to four cases it was possible to ensure sufficient depth whilst enabling comparison and thematic development (Creswell, 2013: 101).

The case study approach stimulated the discovery of any interconnected or interrelated factors linking the theory to practice and thereby highlighting and helping to explain behaviours and outcomes (Denscombe, 2010a: 53). By doing this, it highlighted each CoSA as a unique set of individuals and circumstances which facilitated evaluation of not only their similarities, but also their differences (Gibbs, 2007). It was these differences that helped to provide a response to the research questions especially when exploring why one CoSA had a different trajectory to another.

The research programme was designed so that it was possible to gather data at consecutive points within the CoSA's lifecycle, although practical issues meant not all timescales were strictly adhered to. This longitudinal aspect assisted in the identification and consideration of changes in the participant's perspectives. The cases considered the Primrose core members, volunteers and co-ordinators experiences due to inclusion in the model, their interaction with others within the CoSA and how participation affected their views and beliefs of certain concepts. An example of this was the volunteers changing attitudes towards accountability and boundaries is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 on support and accountability. This meant that the questions were researched reflecting adaptations and tensions on a real-time basis and any changing views were highlighted. Therefore the phenomena of a CoSA and the complicated nature of its interactions were evaluated in depth by considering events as they happened, highlighting not only claimed successes and failures, but progression from beginning to end (Yin, 2014: 12). This captured the foundations and day to day workings of the process with its inevitable impact on the parties. Such investigation enabled the analysis of situations "that are too complex for survey or experimental methods [which have] no clear, single set of outcomes" (Yin, 2014: 19).

The data collected produced not only detailed descriptions of the CoSA process, but also the social context and consequences of the process (Creswell, 2013). As Denscombe (2010b: 34) highlighted, the case study can provide rich and detailed data about a process that deals with "complex social situations". He suggested that by considering complicated social and individual

issues on a day to day basis, findings are more likely to be authentic and based in truth. However, despite the benefits of theory generation and testing associated with case studies, this approach can be criticised for the limitations of its findings (Bryman, 2012). It is argued that a case study has a specific set of facts from which particular consequences are derived and therefore findings cannot be generalised, they can only be extended to those situations which are similar (Bell, 2010; Bryman, 2012; Denscombe, 2010a; Thomas, 2009).

Nevertheless there was the opportunity to make a comparison between the case studies and other studies being undertaken within the UK in association with other Circles UK projects (Banks *et al.*, 2015; McCartan, 2016; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). Despite the differences in strategies, methodologies and participants, certain concepts can be compared and contrasted. The benefit of such comparisons is a greater understanding of common phenomena. This can, strengthen or suggest an emerging theory, or possibly “act as a springboard for theoretical reflections about contrasting findings” (Bryman, 2012: 75). Yin (2014: 21) has also suggested that case study research is not about generalizing against populations, but should be used in conjunction with theoretical propositions, thereby expanding and exploring theories.

The Primrose CoSAs, due to the very diverse and complicated nature of the core members and their backgrounds, each add something further to the research evidence. In this way my study includes “balance ... variety ... and [importantly] an opportunity to learn” (Stake, 2000: 447). The sample was relatively small and there was a requirement in practice to be responsive to the needs of the core member which meant certain research design adaptations were made. It was not only the needs of the core member which dictated change, but also the availability of professional staff and volunteers, their respective personalities and methods of working. This was, and continues to be, a new venture for the Primrose management team. As they became more familiar with the process and potential problems they refined processes and procedures endeavouring to mitigate established difficulties. All of the above will introduce variables so it is acknowledged that the comparisons arrived at required a degree of supposition and interpretation. It should also be noted that although the small sample size and lack of control sample could be a criticism of this study, this criticism is common to studies with this particular group (those

with learning disabilities) (Craig *et al.*, 2012: 15). Undertaking a study with those who have learning disabilities has many complications and barriers and is a difficult process to navigate. I will discuss this later in this chapter.

The Primrose CoSA Lifecycle – A Case

As highlighted each Primrose CoSA was capable of being a case. Each had a series of common stages, pre-circle and circle processes (phases one and two). These processes are described below, in Appendix 2 and are further explored in Chapters 6 and 7 on accountability and risk.

The Primrose volunteers were initially recruited by newspaper advertisement, word of mouth (ie volunteers/individuals promoting the volunteering opportunity to others), or referral from Circles UK or other CoSA projects. The volunteers were asked to complete application forms and were initially interviewed either face to face or by telephone. Non-selection was an infrequent occurrence. The reasons for not progressing the volunteer further were often intangible, based very much on the Primrose co-ordinator's perception of the individual and their attitudes. This was a reason given for the non-selection of a prospective volunteer:

“[he/she was] coming to it from an odd fascination of sex offending.”
(Helen)

After being selected, the individuals were invited to attend a two day initial training course. This initial training evolved over the period in which the Primrose volunteers were recruited. However, core topics were learning disability, sexual offending (focusing heavily on pathways and why those with learning disability may exhibit such behaviour) and CoSAs (history and processes). There was little reference to risk management in the training programme, although there was reference to 'safeguarding', which was about internal issue escalation.

This training was utilised by the co-ordinator as another form of volunteer assessment. After this training, the volunteers were either interviewed for a second time, or informed that they were not suitable for the role. Again rejection was rare, I was aware of this happening on three occasions. The reasons given

for this were that the individual felt too dominating or overbearing or that the individual had political opinions that were at odds with the model. Frequently the co-ordinator had discussions with potential volunteers after the training to clarify concerns. These worries often related to the volunteers fear of becoming either too involved or insufficiently involved with the core member and therefore unable to objectively carry out their role.

After the training the co-ordinator applied for two personal references and Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) (previously Criminal Record Bureau) checks were made for all the suitable volunteers. The above recruitment, vetting and training process is fairly common to all Circles UK CoSAs (Banks *et al.*, 2015). Additional non-mandated volunteer training was provided throughout the lifecycle of the Primrose CoSAs which continued to focus on the issues of learning disabilities.

The Primrose core members were referred to the Primrose Project because of their learning disabilities and their previous and/or continuing potential sexually harmful behaviour. Referral appeared to be on an adhoc, non-defined basis, with each referring agency using different risk assessments and protocols. Nevertheless, there was a Primrose Project generated 'Core Member Referral Form' in each Primrose core member's case file (see Appendix 3 for sample form). Referral influences appear to have been existing professional relationships as detailed in Chapter 3 and/or a financially subsidised programme for a complex problem (a young person with a learning disability who had exhibited sexually harmful behaviour). The Primrose Project had obtained funding in order to establish the CoSA model and set up a number of circles. This meant that the circles within the Primrose Project were either wholly or partially funded by this grant.

Following referral, the Primrose core members, and if possible their families, were interviewed over a period of time. This was to ensure that participation was genuinely voluntary and that the core member had a degree of familiarity with the process. The core members also went through a series of evaluations which would help construct a picture of their emotional and intellectual capabilities. The Primrose core members' case files highlight that there were many reasons put forward by the core members for wanting to be part of such a

programme which include, practical reasons (help with forms and authorities) and social or emotional reasons (having someone to talk to about feeling angry or making new friends). These case files provided data for the analysis and are discussed later in this chapter.

Once the volunteers and core members had been recruited and participation had been agreed, phase one of the CoSA was instigated and a volunteer 'social meeting' was arranged. This was where the volunteers met to either acquaint or reacquaint (if they had already met at the initial training) themselves with each other. It was also where, if there was to be no formal 'disclosure meeting' with the core member present, the core member's sexually harmful behaviour was discussed.

The initial discussion of the Primrose core member's previous sexually harmful behaviour with the volunteers happened either at the 'social meeting' or at a dedicated 'disclosure meeting'. The Primrose management team decided whether the core member should be present when initially communicating his previous behaviour to the volunteers. This decision was based on whether there would be a negative effect on the process and/or the wellbeing of the core member. If the Primrose management team judged it detrimental for the core member to be present when initially telling the volunteers about the core member's sexually harmful behaviour then the Primrose co-ordinator would detail the behaviour at the 'social meeting'. If the core member was deemed emotionally mature and robust enough to be party to such disclosure, this would take place at a dedicated 'disclosure meeting' following the 'social meeting'. Present at the 'disclosure meeting' would be: the core member; representatives of the Primrose management team including the co-ordinator; other core member associated third party professionals (if they were sufficiently engaged with the process) and the circle volunteers. These third party professionals would potentially be considered 'stakeholders'. Disclosure is further discussed in Chapter 6 and 7 on accountability and risk.

Disclosure was followed by the 'initial circle meeting'. The core member, volunteers and co-ordinator would discuss how the CoSA would work and agree the rules of the circle. Circles UK have a template circles contract (see Appendix 4). However, it was recognised that the Primrose core member's literacy and communication abilities were limited and the volunteers were

encouraged to agree a bespoke agreement with the core member. This agreement was linguistically more simplistic, highlighting goals and basic rules, for example, being honest and turning up on time (Circle 1 case file). Thereafter in phase one, all the volunteers would meet the core member on a weekly basis to support and hold him accountable. These meetings did not include the co-ordinator unless something difficult needed to be discussed. The meetings continued until the implementation of phase two which was instigated by the co-ordinator. In phase two, meetings became less rigid and more social and often took place outside a formal meeting environment, frequently with just a couple of the volunteers. The end of the circle was marked by a celebratory event where the core member and his achievements were recognised by the volunteers.

Throughout both phases one and two, the co-ordinator arranged circle reviews with all the parties: core member, their families, volunteers, third party professionals ('stakeholders') and co-ordinator to ensure that all issues and concerns were openly discussed. This was often an opportunity for the 'stakeholders' to give their input into the CoSA and for the volunteers to act as the core members' advocate. Throughout the circle the co-ordinator completed Circles UK's bespoke Dynamic Risk Review (Appendix 5 contains a copy of the DRR) and volunteer and core member interviews. Finally the co-ordinator carried out exit interviews with all the CoSA participants which were documented and the case file for the circle was closed. Participation in these interviews depended upon the time and willingness of those involved and therefore did not happen regularly or for every individual.

Ethics

My research had considerable ethical concerns as those at the centre of the study were a particularly vulnerable and sensitive group; young people with learning disabilities. My research proposal went through a protracted negotiation process. The initial ethics approval prohibited the interviewing of the Primrose core members. However, I regarded core member involvement as very important. Their non-participation could have a labelling effect suggesting that their views were unimportant and without their participation their needs or

opinions would be “prescribed for them” (Goodey, 1999: 45). Inclusion of core member input should be central to measuring the success of the model and therefore important to the research (Pitts and Porteous, 2005). I had originally hoped to interview the core members twice within the research process, however, this proved unachievable. Approval from the University’s Ethics Board was only given after considerable debate and was subject to certain stipulations. I could only interview those core members who were 18 years old or over and capable of giving consent. The ability to give consent had to be verified by the Primrose management team prior to interview. A revised ethics statement was submitted to Middlesex University’s Ethics Committee and final approval was granted on 8th June, 2014 (see Appendix 6).

It was also agreed that contact with all those involved with the Primrose CoSA would be directed through the Primrose co-ordinator. I was both contractually and morally bound to adhere to the Primrose Project’s rules with respect to ethics and confidentiality. The Primrose management team and co-ordinators had their own organisational codes of conduct and used those of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). However, these codes contained limited detail in respect of research (paragraphs 36-39 (BACP, 2010)) therefore I adopted the British Sociological Association’s (BSA) Statement of Ethical Practice (BSA, 2004) to assist with ethical matters.

For the purpose of the interviews and focus groups, written consent was obtained from all those whose data was collected and processed. Consent was “freely given” and “informed” (BSA, 2004 para. 16). I adopted two processes for obtaining consent.

Volunteer and Co-ordinator Focus Groups and Interviews

Before interviewing or the commencement of the focus group, the participant(s) were advised of the purpose of the interview/focus group and told that they could refuse to participate at any point in the process (BSA, 2004 para. 17). They were advised that the interview/focus group would be recorded for transcription purposes only and that there would be no reference to names in the transcript. Instead I allocated either a pseudonym or a dedicated reference number (see the Abbreviation Table for details). They were also told that the

recording would be destroyed at the end of the research period. These statements were incorporated in a written document for the participant to sign as indication of their consent (see Appendix 7). All participants were emailed copies of their transcripts and given an opportunity to comment (BSA, 2003 para. 23).

Core Member Interviews

As mentioned, I only had approval to interview those core members who were 18 years old or over and who were capable of giving informed consent as confirmed by the Primrose management team. As the Primrose core members had all been assessed by a psychologist the Primrose management team were in a position to evaluate the core member's intellectual capacity and whether they were capable of giving informed consent. The interview questions were also vetted by the Primrose co-ordinator to ensure there were no concerns about their suitability. As the core members were particularly vulnerable, I used the following process:

1. The consent form was a bespoke document within an 'easy-read' format. I adapted an existing consent form for the purpose of my study and included details of the interview questions (See Appendix 8).
2. Prior to the interview the process was explained in a clear and sensitive manner to the core member, using advice and assistance from the Primrose co-ordinator if necessary (Hays *et al.*, 2003:182). The questions were read to the core member to ensure he was fully aware of the nature of the interview. He was given an opportunity to ask any questions about the process. If required, a volunteer from his circle would be present to ensure he felt supported. This was the case for the only core member interviewed (Alex).
3. The core member was to be given time to consider whether he wished to take part in the interview and ask any further questions. The interview was not completed on the same day as the initial request, therefore ensuring the core member did not feel pressured to

agree at that point. The core member was advised that once he had reached a decision on whether or not to be interviewed, he could tell his circle who would advise me of his decision.

4. On agreement to be interviewed, a date was established that coincided with a circle meeting and he was encouraged to have a CoSA volunteer present throughout the interview.
5. The interview was relatively short, lasting no longer than 30 minutes. It was agreed at the outset that if at any point the core member appeared distressed, or if the core member or volunteer requested it, the interview would be stopped.
6. It was agreed that someone would read through the transcribed interview with the core member to make sure he was happy with the content. The volunteer present at the interview with Alex did this and confirmed he was still happy to include the transcript in my study.
7. The process was undertaken at a speed that reflected the individual's information processing abilities (Hays *et al.*, 2003: 182). The interview was undertaken with a high level of sensitivity to ensure the core member was happy and comfortable with the process (Corbin and Morse, 2003).

Research Methods

One of the benefits of using a case study approach is that multiple data collection methods can be used. The data for this study was drawn from volunteer focus groups, interviews, observations (captured in a field diary) and the circle case files. Access to this information was facilitated through my position as an employed researcher for the Primrose Project. This role had been secured on the understanding that I would use the data to complete both my PhD and produce a final report for the Primrose management team.

Focus Groups – Group Interviews

Focus groups or group interviews provided the main method of collecting the Primrose volunteers' thoughts on the CoSA process. It allowed me to gather

information at three points in the circle which would have been impossible if I had interviewed each volunteer separately. This data gathering opportunity is the distinct advantage of focus groups (Robson, 2011). The focus group data was fundamental to the research questions as it provided a collective insight into the CoSA process on a contemporary and reflective basis. It allowed me to question the volunteers as a collective and experience a CoSA fundamental, the group dynamics. This facilitated not only focus group driven data, but also observational data which added greater depth and understanding. It enabled me to witness both the obvious changes to the model and the individuals, and the subtle ones which were often only reflected in the group silences or hesitations.

The focus groups were conducted in a semi structured manner allowing for flexibility whilst being able to pursue certain key concepts. The semi-structured nature also induced discussion and facilitated debates within the group. The initial focus groups took place at the beginning of the CoSA process, either at volunteer training or at the 'social meeting'; both were prior to any volunteer interaction with the core member. Conducting the focus group at the 'social meeting' ensured that time was not an issue and proved to be a popular ice-breaker. As highlighted by Robson (2011:294), participants tend to enjoy focus groups and whilst the volunteers were all nervous about their circle they were very enthusiastic and happy to spend time talking to me. It also meant that unlike the other focus groups this one was embedded within the CoSA process therefore did not require a separate meeting. As highlighted by Punch (2014: 147), such group interviews can be "inexpensive, data-rich, flexible, stimulating, recall-aiding, cumulative and elaborative".

This first focus group allowed the volunteers to highlight their existing views, particularly with reference to sexually harmful behaviour and learning disabilities. It was also useful to explore the volunteer's initial perceptions of how the CoSA model would work, especially their thoughts on the dual aims of support and accountability. I also used several themes highlighted in existing research (Armstrong, *et al*, 2008; Cesaroni, 2001; Clarke, 2011; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008; Wilson *et al.*, 2005 and 2007a). In the following focus groups I was able to chart any changing constructions and their CoSA experiences.

The second focus group was initially scheduled for a mid-point in the CoSA process, however, this was almost impossible to achieve. This was due, in part, to the availability of all the volunteers and the fact that some circles were cut short and others went on longer than expected. In some cases a focus group had to be conducted without a full contingency of circle volunteers. The final focus group was completed after the last formal CoSA meeting. Having the final focus group several weeks after the circle closure allowed the volunteers a degree of time and distance in which to reflect on the activities of the circle as a whole, rather than the issues they were dealing with at the point of closure. It permitted them the freedom to be critical and/or constructive about the model without feeling this reflected upon their performance. The focus groups had the following intervals from the first focus group: Circle 1 - 16 and 25 months; Circle 2 – 11 and 18 months; Circle 3 - 6 and 22 months and Circle 4 - 9 and 14 months. The exact dates are detailed in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7 Volunteer Focus Group Timetable

	Circle 1	Circle 2	Circle 3	Circle 4
Focus Group 1	03.02.2013	10.06.2013	11.11.2013	31.10.2013
Focus Group 2	08.07.2014	19.05.2014	13.05.2014	23.07.2014
Focus Group 3	05.03.2015	15.12.2014	22.09.2015	03.12.2014

These three focus groups were also designed to interface with the stages of the CoSA process, meeting the core member, the change from formal to smaller more social meetings and finally reflection after the closure of the CoSA. Despite logistical obstacles, I was able to complete twelve focus groups at varying points in the circle process. The longitudinal aspect of the focus groups was included within the research process to facilitate an appreciation of the changing attitudes of the volunteers. This allowed me to capture how repeated social interaction and experiences affected opinions and insights.

Focus groups have infrequently been used in other CoSA studies (Fox, 2013). This may be due to research not being an integrated part of other CoSA programmes. I would suggest that I have been fortunate in being able to undertake a structured investigation. Unlike other studies I was able to carry out my research on a real time basis with the support of the Primrose management team, therefore gaining access to the volunteers at various times in the research programme.

The focus groups were between 30-60 minutes long, initially voice recorded and then transcribed. The same topics questions/prompts were used for each circle (see Appendix 9). These topics were initially derived from previous research and thereafter from the developing themes of my analysis and my research questions. Many of the questions were linked to ones asked in a previous focus group so that I could plot any changes. This meant that although themes were followed, discussions were sufficiently fluid to include diverse and original issues. This, however, did produce varied information which took time to develop and compare (Flick, 2009: 201). This led to connections being made because the volunteers were allowed to follow thought processes, jointly reflect, and develop and expand on the unexpected.

All the focus groups were managed to ensure that the parties had an equal opportunity to participate, ensuring that no one party dominated the group. Furthermore, comments from all participants were encouraged without changing the dynamics of the group. Group dynamics have been highlighted as an advantage to the use of focus groups in research as it provides a natural check and balance on information. Participants are frequently willing to question opinions they believe to be incorrect whilst stimulating discussion (Robson, 2011). The use of focus groups within my research was particularly appropriate as the volunteers were told that the group was the central element to the CoSA process enabling them to effectively support and hold the core member accountable. At the beginning of the process, all the volunteers were strangers. Therefore it was not merely the focus group dialogue that was of interest, but how the volunteers responded to and interacted with each other and whether this interaction changed over time. From my observations of these focus groups, it could be hypothesised which CoSA would function well and which would experience difficulties. This can be illustrated by, Circle 4, whose volunteers were very quiet in their first focus group, much more so than the other groups. They were reticent to answer questions and when they did their answers were relatively short and perfunctory. They appeared to feel very uncomfortable with each other. This circle had considerable problems with volunteer communication and commitment, as will be highlighted in Chapter 5 on support, much more so than any of the other circles.

Despite the advantages of focus groups, there are concerns about this data collection method. Focus groups emphasise collective experiences rather than personal ones and whilst they highlight the quality and scope of the participants' views they are less likely to reveal any intensity of feeling (Robson, 2011: 298). Therefore, focus groups like interviews are tempered by social and cultural realities (Bryman, 2012; Robson, 2011). On reflection this may have been true of my study, especially when the volunteers felt a particular response would reflect negatively on their fellow volunteers. This was particularly apparent in the final focus group for Circles 1 and 4. In both of these focus groups the volunteers were able to express concerns about certain issues due to the absence of a circle volunteer. Being part of a group is central to the CoSA model and therefore working and engaging as a unit is seen as fundamental to its success. This meant that anything which had the potential of disturbing the group's equilibrium was actively avoided. Therefore, whilst using focus groups had considerable advantages and remained an important part of the research process, I recognise that there were problems that could have been addressed by including more one to one interview opportunities.

Interviews

Eleven formal interviews were completed for my study. Interviews were conducted with: the core member (1) who was over 18 and capable of giving consent, Primrose co-ordinators (2 x 2), the volunteers (5) and a third party professional (1) who was closely involved with Joe at the time of the CoSA. Interviewing participants is probably the most common method of collecting qualitative data as it is believed to be a valuable method of discovering individuals' thoughts and perceptions on issues (Punch, 2014: 144). Interviews have been used in much of the existing CoSA research, featuring heavily in the most recent studies (Armstrong, *et al*, 2008; Armstrong and Wills, 2014; Banks *et al.*, 2015; Bellamy and Watson, 2013; Clarke, 2011; Fox, 2015 and 2016; Hannem, 2013; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008; Höing *et al.*, 2015; McCartan, 2016; Northcutt Bohmert *et al.*, 2016; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). Interviews are a tractable method of probing issues, where a researcher can adapt his/her next question based on a response (Robson, 2011: 280). They facilitate not only the asking of questions, but the ability to hear and watch the response.

The majority of the Primrose Project member interviews (10) embraced both an unstructured and semi-structured framework. This was because although there were designated topics these could be directed by the interviewee who had a licence to expand into areas they believed important and relevant (Robson, 2011). This flexibility frequently promoted unscripted follow up questions which were not fixed to any specific themes (Punch, 2014:145). The other interview, with Alex, was much more structured in nature which was intentional in order to alleviate any potential discomfort (see earlier core member interview procedure). However, despite the core member's interview having designated questions, there was an opportunity for him to expand upon the questions and develop his own interview.

Whilst interviewing is a frequently used method of data collection for many qualitative studies, it does have its limitations. The data is not considered 'pure', but is affected by the presence of the interviewer and how those responding to the questions view the interviewer (Punch, 2014:151). I have suggested in the reflexivity section of this chapter that I tried to be aware of my impact on those I was interviewing due to my age, sex, ethnicity and class and my own particular biases. Furthermore, I was aware that those I interviewed or observed may be reacting in a particular way because they believed a certain type of response was required (Erikson, 2012). This is particularly true of those with learning disabilities who often provide the answer they believe the person asking the question wants (Erikson, 2012). However, despite being aware of these factors it was difficult, if not impossible, to recognise such responses.

Punch (2014: 152) also highlights that in the interview situation we assume that "language is a good indicator of thought and action" whereas this is not necessarily the case. He suggests that an interview is a constructed situation and therefore should be viewed as such. This would be true for not only the interviews in my study, but also the focus group data which too had its own set of constructions. Despite these concerns, the data derived from the interview scripts enabled a more rounded response to the research questions and enabled me to include core member and co-ordinator perspectives.

Volunteer Interviews

In addition to the focus groups I completed five volunteer interviews. The volunteer interviews were important to the research process as I was able to obtain details of specific or unusual CoSA events. These events included: supporting a core member through a court case (C1Vol1), leaving and starting a circle at a nonstandard point in the circle's lifecycle (C2Vol1/C3Vol5; C2Vol5) and leaving the circle prior to the final focus group (C1Vol4; C4Vol4). These were considered appropriate as they either supplemented the existing research design or drew on a particular situation which could have had an effect on the CoSA process. These interviews were of a more structured or focused nature facilitating the detection of common or unusual factors (Bell, 2010). The questions for those who were not able to attend the last focus groups were the same as the final focus group. The questions for the other interviews focused on the specific event and how it affected him/her and the other circle participants. I found the interviews to be relatively successful, all contributing data to the research findings.

These interviews also highlighted the limitations of the focus groups as individuals appeared to feel less constrained in their comments by the need to function as part of a cohesive and conformist group. This, however, was only something which was evident towards the end of the research programme making it impractical to add any further volunteer interviews.

Core Member Interviews

I only carried out one core member interview at the end of the CoSA process which was in part due to the protracted ethical approval process. Once final ethical approval had been granted the co-ordinator and respective volunteers approached the three core members who were over 18 years of age to see whether they would agree to be interviewed. Joe refused to be interviewed, Tad did not respond to the request after an explanatory discussion, but Alex agreed to be interviewed. There could have been many reasons for the core members' refusal, they may have had concerns about the interview process and/or the individual carrying out the interview (Lewis and Porter, 2004). Crocker *et al.* (2007) highlighted in their study of criminal justice provisions and individuals

with learning disabilities that many prospective participants refused to be party to the research⁶. Joe, in particular, had highlighted his considerable distrust of professionals and assessments. This distrust or general wariness by the core members of those who appear to have a professional interest in them is discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6 on support and accountability.

Alex, the only core member interviewed, was the oldest of the core members. He may have been familiar with an interview type process as, having been convicted of an offence, he had been party to a treatment programme and therapy. Furthermore, a volunteer in his circle had highlighted (in their second focus group) that Alex wanted to be seen as having changed and was anxious to be viewed as co-operating with his rehabilitation programme.

“he really wants to prove to people that he’s capable of their trust ... he’s being used as a role model for other contemporaries who are in the hospital and getting an opportunity to talk to them about the benefits of being disciplined, taking the hospital regime seriously, not fighting it because ultimately it has a purpose.” C3Vol3

Interviewing a person with a learning disability also highlighted additional problems other than issues of trust. The wording used in the interview needed to be simple, questions needed to be kept short and unambiguous. However, despite the open ended nature of the questions, answers given were largely “yes” or “no”. Furthermore, when encouraged to expand on these statements Alex found it difficult to reflect, relying on the volunteer present to prompt him. It has been previously noted that people with learning disabilities may find being interviewed difficult. They will often choose to say “yes” to closed questions if they are struggling to understand, don’t know how to respond or want to please the interviewer (Hays *et al.*, 2007: 107).

This difficulty with reflection was evident with all the core members throughout my study and was not simply something pertinent to the interview situation. This was evidenced in a statement given by one of Circle 3’s volunteers in their second focus group when she responded to a question about setting goals for Alex:

⁶ Just under 40% of their sample refused to participate.

"I think he would find that quite difficult, it is like saying what activities would you like to do? You come up with suggestions and he can choose perhaps what he likes, but I think that the question is too big for him."

C3Vol2

So perhaps, despite endeavouring to make the interview questions simple they were just 'too big'. It should be acknowledged that he may have found it difficult to express anything negative about the model with a circle volunteer being present. He also knew that I was involved with the Primrose Project and may not have wanted to displease me by being critical of it.

However, despite the challenges involved in interviewing the core members, it is recognised that for future research more investment should be made in encouraging participation from the core members. It is important that their views are sensitively sought. Without the opinion of the individual using the service, the research is missing an important component (Hays *et al.*, 2007). This is particularly true for those who have learning disabilities, and their families, who are frequently ignored because of the added complications of seeking their views. As suggested by Hays *et al.*, (2007: 106), in their reference to the Department of Health's White Paper, *Valuing People*, those with intellectual disabilities should be listened and responded to as they are putting forward the views of the service users (Department of Health, 2001). Furthermore without involvement in such research they are being excluded from a method of promoting change (Goodey, 1999). On reflection, further investigation should have been made with reference to different, non-verbal, methods of communication such as the use of pictures or diagrams to alleviate potential participant discomfort and expand the range of responses given (Aldridge, 2007; Brewster, 2004).

The Primrose Co-ordinator Interviews

The co-ordinator interviews were important as they provided information concerning not only the perceived circle successes, but also organisational issues. The Primrose Project had several co-ordinators working on the CoSA projects throughout the research period and interviews were completed at different stages during the respective CoSA's lifecycles. This produced four

transcribed interviews and 15 sets of meeting minutes. The co-ordinator interviews were fairly unstructured interviews allowing the co-ordinator the opportunity to expand on areas which were, for her, a problem or concern. The interviews also included the themes discussed in the focus groups and any new or ongoing issues. I used both formal (recorded and transcribed) interviews and meeting notes to record my engagement with the co-ordinator. I found that using a mixture of these techniques meant that the relationship remained responsive and friendly. The addition of a microphone appeared to add a layer of formality which was not always helpful when discussing sensitive issues.

The recording of the co-ordinator's constant and changing views were important to capture as this inevitably filtered down to the volunteers and core members. It was also valuable to record other issues not specifically related to the cases. It should be recognised that whilst endeavouring to remain focused on the CoSA process themes connected to practicalities of managing such a process, (ie difficulty of accessing suitable venues due to funding constraints, and internal Primrose Project and Circles UK politics) had an impact upon these discussions. Therefore the interviews also drew attention to the potential for policy and practice changes as the Primrose Project became further involved with both the model and Circles UK.

Observation

I was fortunate enough to be involved with the Primrose Project for over three years, visiting the offices on a regular, often weekly, basis. I observed and participated in events throughout my study. These included, volunteer training and some CoSA meetings and professional meetings. I was introduced to all the parties as a researcher for the Primrose Project and all interactions took place within the closed setting of the CoSA process (Bryman, 2012).

Observation has been used in other CoSA research, but researchers tended to base this on short visits to operational sites (Thomas *et al.*, 2014; McCartan, 2016). However, such observation was limited due to research project time constraints (Armstrong and Wills, 2014). The exception to this in the UK was the Banks *et al.*, (2015) study in which two of the researchers had operational roles within the CoSAs observed.

My approach to observation can be explored through Gold's (1958) research on field work as discussed by Burgess (1984: 81). Burgess (1984) stated that there was more than one method of carrying out observations: complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participant, and complete observer. However, my observer status did not appear to be fixed, it seemed to change throughout the research period depending upon who I was interacting with. Therefore, I was, as suggested by Mason (2002), at several positions on an observational continuum throughout the project. I was anywhere between complete participant and complete observer depending on the depth and degree of the interaction with the parties. I had regular meetings with the Primrose management team and co-ordinator and was involved with them in a collaborative way, assisting with various ancillary tasks (i.e. presentations at Circle UK meetings), therefore the relationship was a more participatory one. However, the relationship with the core members was observational as I only interacted with one core member when I interviewed him.

Observation enabled me to gather a different type of data. The advantage to this information is that it was "direct" (Robson, 2011; 316). I watched what people said and did and collected information directly from these actions. This data was useful when addressing the research question about concept tensions. It enabled me to observe as well as hear about the conflicts inherent within the CoSA model and how they were addressed. This observational data included information about interaction between the participants, which due to their proximity, may not have been evident to them or was taken for granted in the context of the CoSA process (Flick, 2009: 225). Observing and participating in the CoSA experience facilitated a better understanding of the meanings attached to participant experiences and potentially facilitated a more accurate interpretation of both experiences and the social constructions that shaped them (Burgess, 1984: 78). Being a participant observer had the advantage of appearing to the participants to be non-judgemental with similar objectives and perspectives. It was important to ensure those within the CoSA considered me to be a friendly researcher. This was particularly true because of the labels attached to sexually harmful behaviour and the apprehension of 'courtesy stigma' (Goffman, 1963) as detailed in Chapter 7 on risk.

However, the fact that participant observation allowed me to interact and

develop relationships with the study participants created other research issues. There was the potential for me to become “part of the context that [was] being observed” thereby possibly influencing the actions of the participants (Burgess, 1984: 80). I also recognised that it was not only the participants who could be affected by my presence, but that my judgement could be influenced inducing the potential for bias or “going native” (Burgess, 1984: 82). I endeavoured to resist this by remaining conscious of my attitudes, feelings and personal social constructions (Chavez, 2008). To counter this problem, I logged my thoughts and concerns in a field diary and discussed these with my supervisors (Unluer, 2012).

Field Diary

I noted my observations in a field diary as and when they occurred. This was only in brief note form, but these notes were read through immediately after the observation and if necessary supplemented with additional information. I did not take notes for every meeting, much depended on the type of meeting and who was present. If I felt that taking notes would affect the party’s responses I waited until afterwards to make the notes. I was aware that I had to be mindful of how I interpreted events particularly if these events were not recorded within a reasonable time. Observations contained details about the setting, those involved, the reasons for the meeting, details of actions and responses and what feelings were generated in both those being observed and myself. I recognised that these observations were potentially subject to issues of selectivity (Robson, 2011: 328). This meant that I had to be conscious of my own biases which may have led me to pay attention to particular individuals and disregard others. To enhance the neutrality required the observations were put through a filter of self-reflection and supervisor scrutiny to add further reliability.

Case Files

Circle case files were used throughout my study. These case files included meeting minutes, risk assessments, review meeting minutes, emails, questionnaires, surveys and checklists. Each volunteer also had a file which

contained his/her application, a Disclosure and Barring Service check (DBS), references and any notes taken by the co-ordinator at supervision meetings. These documents allowed me to engage with the CoSA in a different way as they were not instigated or driven by the research (Bryman, 2012: 543; Robson, 2011: 348). Nevertheless, it is recognised that whilst the documentation was not generated as a result of my research my analysis of them will have been.

As a source of data the documentation was particularly important when considering the use of risk and risk management techniques and the associated research question. Furthermore, the documentation highlighted issues of support and accountability which were either not evident from the focus groups or interviews or enabled further understanding of the use of these concepts. The core member's comments were also captured in the various documents which provided a greater access to his ongoing concerns and thoughts. This thereby helped to develop a more in-depth picture of the CoSA process playing an important part in responding to the related questions.

The case files contained a number of initial assessments and questionnaires, however, there was no real consistency in the number or how well these documents were completed. Much appeared to depend upon the co-ordinator's expertise and the time available to complete them. This data inconsistency has also been highlighted in other CoSA studies and attributed to the setting up phase of a project (Banks *et al.*, 2015). These assessments included questions about the core member's physical and emotional disposition and domestic situation. All case files contained a Core Member Referral Form (see Appendix 3). The Core Member Referral Forms were the formal trigger for the start of the Primrose CoSA process. These required input from external authorities, they too were sporadically completed depending upon which authority was providing the information.

Another case file standard document was the CoSA meeting minutes. Each CoSA meeting was evidenced by a set of minutes completed by a volunteer. Each circle had its own minute taking protocol decided on by the group. However, there was a Primrose Project template for recording the minutes which was frequently used by the volunteers (see Appendix 10). The minutes evidenced the progress and problems of the core member as told to, and seen by, the volunteers. The CoSA meeting minutes were examined by the Primrose

co-ordinator who initiated and documented any action she felt necessary as a result of any comments made in the minutes. There were also minutes from regular review meetings, completed by the co-ordinator, which included input from the core member, volunteers and other associated professionals (i.e. social worker or key worker) (see Appendix 11).

Also included in the case files were completed Circles UK's Dynamic Risk Reviews (see Appendix 5), which were a mandatory Circles UK requirement for those core members over 18 years of age. This assessment had a series of questions associated with potential risk factors and was completed by the volunteers with assistance from the co-ordinator. It was used not only to monitor, but also to generate discussion with the volunteers and is discussed more fully in Chapter 7 on risk.

Periodically each volunteer met with the co-ordinator on a one to one basis to discuss how they were coping with the pressures of being involved with the CoSA and any concerns they may have. The progress of their particular CoSA was also discussed. Unless the volunteer had a specific issue the main discussion points were prompted by and noted on a Supervision Form (see Appendix 12). At the end of a CoSA each of the volunteers was scheduled to have an exit interview which was to be included in the case file. However, this depended upon the willingness and time of the volunteer and therefore many interviews were not completed.

As with the assessments, the file documentation was often irregular and unstructured, again this was likely to have been due to time and resource constraints. However, any concerns about the lack of documentation was mitigated by the fact that the co-ordinator remained heavily involved with the CoSAs. She stayed in close contact with all the CoSA parties and knew what was going on in the circles on a weekly basis. Therefore, to capture the co-ordinators' knowledge I found it useful to both conduct formal recorded and transcribed interviews and take notes at the regular meeting with the co-ordinator.

In assessing the quality of case file documents I used Scott's (1990) four evaluation criteria; "authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning" as discussed by Bryman (2012: 544). All the case file documents were

generated in connection with the CoSA process. Therefore in one way they could be held to be authentic as they were produced in the management of a CoSA. However, if examined more closely it could be suggested that the documents, even those standard to all CoSAs, had many roles. The obvious role would be that of circle management, but another is to possibly provide an audit trail. A method of justifying certain actions and therefore written accordingly. The case files were subject to audit by Circles UK. Although this was a possibility it did not seem evident as the files appeared to be relatively ad hoc and uncontrived.

The issue of credibility was interesting as many of the assessments were completed by someone who had little or no training in this area. Therefore mistakes, or misjudgements were inevitable. Furthermore, whilst noting that these documents were prepared by individuals who had certain skill sets and workloads, the credibility of core member referral should be perhaps be further questioned. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that certain criteria could be manipulated to ensure that referrals were accepted. Whilst this is a possibility I would suggest that such manipulation did not purposely happen within the Primrose Project as it was not necessary. There was no question of competing for referral as referrals were relatively rare and provided there was a learning disability and some form of sexually harmful behaviour they were likely to be accepted.

The meaning of the documents contained within the files, like all the data, were subject to interpretation thereby subject to confusion and mistake (Bryman, 2012: 551). Atkinson and Coffey (2011) suggest that documents have their own reality and purpose which may not be connected to unfiltered fact. Bryman (2012: 555) also suggests that most documents have an audience and they are likely be written with this audience in mind. Therefore careful scrutiny was exercised when using the data contained in such documents ensuring that they were considered within the context in which they were drafted (Bryman, 2012).

CoSA documentation has been used in many CoSA studies (Armstrong *et al.*, 2008; Armstrong and Wills, 2014; Bates *et al.*, 2007; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008; McCartan *et al.*, 2014) and continues to be a source of valuable research data. Furthermore, exploring the circle documentation for untapped data was something highlighted as beneficial in the Bates *et al.*, (2014) study and Clarke

et al. (2016) suggested such data would provide greater contextual and policy insights.

Non Case Generated Data – Conferences

As the Primrose Project researcher I was invited to numerous conferences and events. These facilitated the expansion of my understanding of areas such as learning disabilities and provided me with an insight into what was happening in the world of mainstream CoSAs. It also helped me understand the non CoSA issues which were affecting those who managed the model. These conferences were frequently used for information dissemination, networking and highlighting available services, however, what did become evident was that service funding was a major issue.

The Primrose management team held its own CoSA launch event. Their audience was primarily health and social care professionals. Discussions at this event proved very informative with many acknowledging the potential value of a CoSA. However, all recognised the problem of funding such a programme. This funding deficit caused considerable debate. The main issue for discussion was: “is it a health or social care responsibility?” This question produced a degree of ambiguity which meant that the problem of both the individual and the funding could be bounced between areas and therefore funding streams. It was apparent that this was not a popular stance, but that it was the world they worked in. Funding was also a topic discussed at the many events hosted by Circles UK with extensive discussions on how to locate funding opportunities. There appeared to be a drive to consider other non-traditional avenues for funding such as the Transforming Care Programme (NHS, 2015). This programme is aimed at facilitating community integration for those with learning disabilities and/or autism who may have challenging behavioural issues. This implied that the direction of the CoSA policy was being driven by financial considerations rather than whether it was appropriate or ‘worked’.

Data Analysis

The research methods used in my study generated a considerable amount of

data, all of which needed careful consideration and management. To assist in this task I used a Nvivo “Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software” (CAQDAS) tool (Baxter and Jack, 2008: 554; Bazeley and Jackson, 2013; Gibbs, 2007: 105). The CAQDAS supported both the management of data and the electronic coding of data into ‘themes’. As I was exploring “views, perceptions and/or experiences” of a group of individuals I chose to use a thematic analysis approach to interrogate the data produced (Caulfield and Hill, 2014: 183). I adopted a stepped version of the phased thematic analysis process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) to add a degree of rigour and structure into the analysis.

The first set of focus group questions were informed by several earlier qualitative CoSA studies, my interest in restorative justice and the research questions (Armstrong *et al.*, 2008; Bates *et al.*, 2007; Cesaroni, 2001; Clarke, 2011; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008; Wilson *et al.*, 2005 and 2007a). I transcribed all the focus groups and interviews which provided a degree of familiarity with the data. Once transcribed I read the data through twice noting my initial thoughts on the paper transcript (Braun and Clarke’s (2006) process - phase one). The transcripts were imported into NVivo and the original questions were used as a form of open coding. This amalgamated the four circle responses under the associated questions. The transcripts were then reviewed on a line by line basis in their amalgamated form and were coded (Braun and Clarke’s (2006) process – phase two). This coding was reviewed and dissected to establish collections of “abstract concepts in concrete data” (Neuman, 1991: 416). A number of themes became evident: restorative justice, offending (constructions/ risk management), vulnerable groups (victims/young people/those with learning disabilities), the CoSA model (support and accountability), and working as a group/community (Braun and Clarke’s (2006) process – phase three). At this early stage the volunteers had no or limited exposure to the circle therefore much of the discussion was of abstract or unexperienced subjects. The co-ordinator’s interview was read, included in the CAQDAS and where appropriate incorporated into the established themes. In addition to coding the data I used the memo facility in the CAQDAS to keep note of emerging patterns, relationships or deviations within the data. The data was also explored using other tools inherent in the software to expose other

connections or nonconformities.

On completion of the first analysis of the initial focus groups and interviews the core member's case files were reviewed to establish an initial description of the cases and to build up a picture of the day to day issues of the CoSA and its participants. Such descriptive analysis enhanced the understanding of attitudes and contexts with explicit reference to participant constructions and group workings (Bazeley, 2013: 199; Robson, 2011: 474). I recorded not only the information connected to the emerging themes from this data, but also highlighted any conflicting or other emerging concepts. I finally referred to my meeting notes, observations and field work diary to establish whether anything further could be contributed to the analysis and whether any reflective concerns had surfaced. All this information was captured within the CAQDAS either as part of a node or within the memo facility. This process was repeated on the completion of the second and third set of focus groups.

The themes were reviewed after coding the second and third sets of data (Braun and Clarke's (2006) process – phase four). This meant that I reviewed the themes to ensure they continued to 'work' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 91). After coding the second set of focus groups and interview transcripts the themes were reviewed and changed. The volunteers had now experienced working within the CoSA. They had CoSA related experiences and events to recount. They were also now familiar with the core member and his world. Therefore at this point the themes changed to support, accountability, risk and social constructions. This was because all participant experiences appeared to gravitate around instances of support and accountability and were frequently affected by the perceptions of 'risk', 'sex offender' and 'learning disability'. Also certain sub themes began to emerge which could be placed in more than one theme/sub-theme, such as, the original theme of working as a group. This was included in both the support and risk management groups and is discussed in both Chapters 5 and 7. This dual theme inclusion was also true of professional/non-professional relationships which appeared in both support and accountability. This highlighted the world the core member lived in, where he interacted with lots of people, but had few real friends.

I used the memo facility to note these issues. It was also at this point circle parallels and discrepancies became evident. This analysis was complimented

by the use of the software exploratory function to establish commonly used words and phrases and what themes they linked to. Interestingly, this exploration showed that the language used in data from Circles 1 and 3 had the greatest connection. This was potentially because these two, at the point of the second focus group, were the most active in discussing accountability and risk.

The third set of data prompted a review of the positioning of social constructions. As the volunteers reflected on what had been achieved in their circles they began to highlight how the greatest risk in their circle was the exploitation of the core members disability. Therefore on further consideration these constructions appeared particularly relevant if considered in conjunction with risk and were therefore incorporated into this theme. The other themes were reaffirmed adding further CoSA process related dimensions, such as support at the end of a circle. This is discussed in Chapter 5 on support. At this point the volunteers were able to be reflective about their experiences. They appeared to be willing to consider their circle's potential failures/limitations and successes. These discussion frequently included the type of relationships they had with their core member. This broaden out the professional/non-professional relationship sub-theme. This can be seen in Chapter 6 on accountability when the volunteers talk about their relationships with their core member.

The focus group and interview transcripts, case files and field diary notes were all re-visited on the completion of the draft analysis to establish whether there was any supporting or contradictory information that had been missed (Braun and Clarke's (2006) process - phases four and five). Models of the changing themes were drafted in the CAQDAS and are included in Appendix 13. The phased analysis not only utilised Bran and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis process, but embraced the longitudinal design of my study. It enabled the comparison and evaluation of emerging and changing attitudes of the participants. This also reflected the organic adaptation of the model and the evolving nature of the CoSA tensions thereby assisting with the associated questions. Therefore as suggested by Bryman (2016: 597) the data was synthesised to deliver both descriptive and analytic themes.

A criticism sometimes suggested of reliance on such software tool is that the researcher loses touch with their respective data (Baxter and Jack, 2008: 554). However, this was not the case in my study as I personally transcribed all the

data and frequently re-read the transcripts of both the interviews and focus groups as a method of re-engaging with the data. Furthermore including the case file and observational data meant that I had to revisit data sources to establish where, or if, they were linked into existing themes.

Triangulation

As mentioned above qualitative studies have been criticised for their unreliable and subjective character due to the interpretive nature of the analysis. I have chosen to address the potential of being overly subjective in several ways. Firstly I have used a number of sources of data. These were used to clarify and verify interpretations (Stake, 2000). An illustration of this is the use of both focus group and case file data to explore the issues Tad and Charlie had with bullying. Repeated experiences, behaviour and/or statements were assessed across the various cases and through different types of data which added depth and strength to understandings. This counters arguments of confusion due to the subjective nature of interpretation (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995: 114) calls this methodological triangulation, suggesting that it may distinguish erroneous interpretations and possibly highlights unconscious bias.

However, it is recognised that despite endeavouring to verify the interpretation of the data through triangulation, due in some part to my own subjective understanding and constructions, this may not result in a completely unbiased explanation of events. In order to gain further validity, participant feedback was sought. The research was disseminated to the participants. Transcripts from both the focus groups and interviews were sent to the participants. All were encouraged to verify or question the content of the transcripts and add further comments if they wished to. Most participants responded by saying that the transcript was fine, but were shocked at their lack of language skills. One volunteer stated that he was obviously feeling negative when I interviewed him, but did not question the content of the transcript.

A further form of participant feedback was undertaken in the form of presentations and discussions where an explanation of the analysis and the associated findings were discussed. This happened with the Primrose management team and co-ordinators throughout the research period. At these

meetings all parties were encouraged to confirm or disagree with interpretations facilitating endorsement and further discussion on potentially new ideas and interpretations. A final overall report was presented to and discussed with the Primrose co-ordinator.

Reflexive Account

In the process of collecting the above data, there was a requirement for sensitivity and reflexivity. As both an in-house researcher and participant observer, I had a greater understanding of the issues behind certain decisions. I was able to contextualise the behaviours and thought processes that resulted in particular participant actions (Bryman, 2012). However, I did recognise that I would inevitably be caught up in my own reality and bias. This happened on many occasions and will be described in greater detail below. Therefore I had to be conscious not only of my attitudes and feelings, but also how age, class, gender, ethnicity and previous professional experiences shaped both my thoughts and the response of those who came into contact with me (Erickson, 2012). As highlighted by Bazeley (2013: 4) “our interpretation is coloured by our previous and current personal, social and cultural experience”. This was particularly important as the topics of sexually harmful behaviour and learning disabilities have a considerable degree of social construction. Within the interviews, focus groups or the available documentation, there was sensitive information and I had to remain unbiased and non-judgmental, constantly scrutinising actions and feelings, without implicitly colluding with harmful thought processes (Blagden and Pemberton, 2010).

Interestingly, I did not experience any judgmental feelings with respect to the core members. I had expected to feel quite a strong reaction to the core members and suspected that I would struggle to remain professional and unbiased. However, this was not the case. I had worried about my reaction to the core members because I had, and still do, work as a volunteer on a survivor’s help-line where I speak to women and girls who have experienced sexually harmful behaviour. I have done this for five years and have built up a picture of those who perpetrate such acts, but the core members did not fit this picture. Whilst I do not share many of the rape myths, such as the stranger on a

dark street, I had a picture of someone cruel and manipulative, albeit either an acquaintance, carer or family member (Gekoski *et al.*, 2016).

I met three of the four core members. These were young men who appeared to have a limited depth of understanding, therefore did not have the requisite intellectual capacities to fulfil my existing preconceptions. I found myself creating a different sort of 'sex offender' category for them (as the volunteers did which is discussed in Chapter 7 on risk). So much so that on one occasion the co-ordinator had to remind me that the core member in question knew what he was doing was wrong. This did make me reflect how unhelpful and misleading the label of 'sex offender' was and that unlike most other offences, its perpetrator is so firmly entrenched in stereotypes and social responses. I had to also constantly remind myself that these core members, or at least three of the four, were not 'ex-offenders' and that by putting them into this model without any real or ongoing distinction, they were inevitably labelled as such.

Meeting the core member and exposure to his social/living environment was a sobering experience. On one occasion I attended a review meeting at Joe's hostel with his social workers, key worker, the volunteers and the co-ordinator. We all sat in a communal area and the core member was questioned about certain recent actions. As I sat in the meeting, I doubted my ability to understand Joe's life. How could I begin to understand his responses and thought processes without having shared any of his experiences? This reflection was after just a short time walking around his neighbourhood and waiting in his home, without even considering his disability and how this would impact upon his environment. I also wondered how those within the circle could grasp the impact of living in such a setting, particularly without redress to a caring family.

This meeting is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6 on accountability; however, it was the feeling of desperation and inevitability I wanted to highlight. The meeting was called because Joe was facing prosecution, expulsion from college and the cessation of his benefits. The meeting was both confrontational and conciliatory to which Joe appeared relatively apathetic. The professionals and volunteers appeared desperate to make him understand the nature of his present situation yet there was a sense of inevitability. This type of situation was one that I had reflected upon in the past, but was never one I had come

face to face with. Such confrontation was very uncomfortable as no one appeared to be able to offer any positive assistance. Yet such confrontational situations were potentially ones that all the core members faced regularly. This experience not only enabled me to reflect on my own capabilities of appreciating the everyday problems of the core members, but also the emotional drain experienced by the volunteers. Furthermore it assisted me, after further reflection, to see why this model could be viewed as an answer to particular social problems. The provision of a group of individuals willing to support the core member could help mitigate such experiences and it was easy to see why any real critical reflection could be avoided. I recognised that I would have to be aware of my own desire to find positives within a model which appeared to offer a community to an isolated and vulnerable young men.

This desire to see the positives in the model came about not only due to the vulnerability of the core members, but also my involvement with the Primrose Project personnel. The Primrose Project had problems with the inception and management of its CoSA. There were no processes or templates in place to support the Primrose Project. All had to be either created or adapted. The Primrose co-ordinators had problems internally with excessive workloads which meant that non-client facing tasks were often postponed. In early 2014 there were two co-ordinators working on the CoSA, both on part-time contracts. However, the senior and most experienced co-ordinator moved and continued her role remotely. This meant that I became more and more involved with the management of the CoSA. This advisory position connected me to my previous professional role where I was often involved in troubleshooting problems and creating solutions. The office based co-ordinator often sought and valued my opinion. This tapped into both my vanity and alleviated the isolation I felt as a PhD student.

The fact that I was awarded a three year nominal bursary (£1,000 a year) to compile a report on the Primrose Project entangled me further. There was no clear specification for the work which meant that I became more involved in the other areas of the project. I frequently spent my time either acting as an administrative assistant or a sounding board for ideas. This included helping with volunteer training, inputting data into the Circles UK data sheets, assisting at Primrose Project based launches and conferences, presentations at third

party organisations and assisting in audits. This meant that my research participant involvement merged into what I thought I needed to do to fulfil the bursary. Whilst this remained the case for a period of time, I realised that I had to extricate myself from this position. I had to do this gradually as I wanted, both professionally as a researcher, and personally, to retain a good relationship with those attached to the Primrose Project. Many of my emerging concerns appeared critical of both the model and by implication those managing the model. I found that I wanted to discuss the research and findings, but had to do this in a sensitive way making the discussions theoretical rather than specific. As the newly appointed co-ordinator became more confident in her role, I was able to distance myself. This allowed me to examine the data more critically and acknowledge that whilst the Primrose Project model had many positive elements, it also had problems.

The other area which caused me considerable reflection was the difficulty of undertaking a study which involved young people with learning disabilities. Initially my concerns were my lack of experience of young people with learning disabilities. This developed into not only concerns about my understanding of learning disabilities per se, but also the social world of such an individual, where even the simplest task was fraught with real or imagined danger. This further resonated when talking to a fellow student whose study included those with disabilities. We had been discussing the smallness of their world and how that made them feel safe. She remarked that perhaps by extending their world it would expose them to problems in areas they had little experience of. At this point I began to realise that my judgements were based on my capabilities and experiences and that widening someone's horizons did not always have positive results.

This lack of appreciation led me to reflect on my desire to interview the core members. Despite the theoretical advantages of including Alex's interview in my research project, I am not sure whether the benefits of being consulted outweighed the anxiety such a process would have induced. It was a process that involved Alex having to talk to yet another third party about something connected to an area of shame and guilt. It was a process that also involved a degree of documentation, albeit 'easy-read'. He had to sign a consent form. The process was designed to ensure he understood and appreciated what he was

agreeing to; however, the prolonged nature may have just extended his anxiety. I endeavoured to handle the interview with sensitivity and respect and believe that it was not a detrimental experience as he appeared relatively happy and relaxed. Nevertheless, I should have redesigned not only the process, but the manner of interviewing. I am sure I could have made it less daunting given more time and experience. I did talk to Alex about whether he would have liked to use pictures to illustrate his experience. He was very interested in art and this was something I would have liked to have explored. It would have been simpler to explain and I believe a less intimidating experience. However, this was not possible as the interview was at the end of the process and he did not remain in contact with any member of the Primrose Project.

Limitations

The limitations of this research study have been highlighted and discussed throughout this chapter. However, for the purpose of future studies it is worth revisiting the main areas of discussion. This is a small study and therefore cannot be readily generalised. It also has limited central participant input. However, these are realities of working with this particular group of individuals and should not detract from the findings of this study. This study has also highlighted that working with people with learning disabilities requires a genuine understanding of the needs of this group which may come at the cost of methodological robustness. This is something for future studies to recognise and embrace, rather than exclude central participant involvement.

Conclusion

The above reflexivity section not only highlights the complex and sensitive nature of my study, but the difficulties of researching those for whom isolation and vulnerability are facts of life. Therefore researching this area had to be undertaken sensitively and thoughtfully. Researching a pilot programme which includes a considerable social aspect inevitably leads to design and methodological decisions. I chose to use a qualitative series of case studies to produce an in-depth understanding of the Primrose Project. This methodological approach enabled the utilisation of numerous forms of data collection which included, focus groups, interviews, observations and case files. This created a

significant amount of data which created a detailed picture of the respective cases facilitating their comparison and analysis (Cresswell, 2013: 99). This design enabled the examination of the Primrose Project and the exploration of the associated research questions despite the complicated worlds of those within my study.

The following three chapters are dedicated to the analysis of the research questions through the concepts of, support, accountability and risk. Applying the research design outlined above and using the data from the focus groups, interviews, observations and case files, the following analysis chapters will explore the research questions. The first of these chapters will investigate how the Primrose CoSAs utilise the concept of support with a group of young people with learning disabilities.

Chapter Five

Support: What it means and its connection to Social and Community Integration for the Primrose Project

Introduction

This chapter explores the fundamental CoSA concept of support as experienced in the Primrose Project. It will consider the Primrose volunteers' initial perceptions of support, the nature of the support required by the core members and how such support creates a relationship of trust. The importance of support will be further investigated particularly with reference to its relationship with accountability. Following this, there is an exploration of how the voluntary and group nature of support shapes the model. The chapter concludes with an examination of the issues of isolation, social support, social capital and reintegration. It will be argued that regardless of the provision of support and social interaction within the CoSA, isolation and the lack of social capital remains a continuing reality for the Primrose core members. The Primrose core members therefore remained as marginalized as they were at the start of the process. These issues will be considered with reference to the research questions, but with particular attention to the adaptation of the model in the quest to arrive at a model that works for those with learning disabilities.

In my study of the Primrose Project, support was a very strong theme. A simple word search of the data held in Nvivo for this project showed that references to support and relationships far outnumbered the mention of accountability and risk. The support given to the core members within the Primrose Project was considerable. This may have been a response to the core members' problematic backgrounds and learning disabilities. The Primrose core members all seemed relatively young (despite their actual age) and had varying learning disabilities. All four had difficult family and socio-economic backgrounds which involved frequent interventions by social services. Three core members were suspected of having experienced sexual abuse and all four had experienced harassment and bullying. All of these issues remained a constant challenge throughout the Primrose CoSAs generating a continual need for the provision of support.

The Primrose Volunteers and the Management Support

At the Outset of the CoSA

The Primrose volunteers' motivations for joining the Primrose Project (as described in the focus groups, interviews and case files, highlighted in Figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 in Chapter 3 on the parties) were similar to that expressed in other UK CoSA studies (Armstrong and Wills, 2014; Banks *et al.*, 2015; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). Many Primrose volunteers highlighted that it was the supportive nature of the model and their belief in the potential of rehabilitation that attracted them to the programme. Several Primrose volunteers initially voiced their desire to 'help' in the first set of focus groups. This supportive drive was even more pronounced when the potential of working with a young person with a learning disability was introduced into the conversation, as shown by this volunteer's comment:

"[This programme] is different [be]cause it is learning disabilities. It is a lot more about support and care." C2Vol1/C3Vol5

Early on in the process, the Primrose volunteers felt that support, unlike accountability, was a relatively straightforward concept. It was as simple as encouraging or helping someone. The volunteers' initial concerns were not about how they were going to fulfil their supportive role, but how they were going to manage their support responsibilities whilst holding their core member accountable. At this stage the volunteers appeared confused about the nature of accountability, but reference was made to previous and potentially future sexually harmful behaviour. There was, from the outset, a recognition of the possible tensions between support and accountability which will be more fully explored in Chapter 6 when examining accountability.

The Primrose volunteers acknowledged that the development of a strong and positive relationship with their core member was key and that such a relationship had the potential to be a powerful positive influence on the core member. They suggested that this influence would not only ensure the core member would not reoffend, but would encourage a 'good life' (Ward and Maruna, 2007a and b), as suggested by this Circle 2 volunteer in their first focus group:

“I don’t think the only aim is that he should not offend again because I think you want him go beyond that point, become a better individual, a happier individual.” C2Vol3

This statement is similar to a point made by Hannem (2013: 277) when she discussed the motivation of the CoSA volunteers in her study. She stated that volunteers were not merely motivated by risk reduction, but also “a desire to see the core member fulfilled and happy”.

The initial comments made by the Primrose volunteers demonstrated that they recognised their support was key in building strong positive relationships. All recognised the model’s strength would emanate from the development of a mutually respectful and trusting connection. This would ensure that the core member had a stake in the relationship, one he would be willing to commit to and work with. There was a recognition throughout all the focus groups that this type of relationship would essentially be built on the support they would give to their core members. It would be their constant compassionate presence that would enable them to build bonds and foster respect. This recognition of the power of the relationship between the members of the circle is recognised in much of the CoSA literature, especially the research from Canada where the model is still very much a community and faith based programme (Armstrong *et al*, 2008; Clarke, 2011; Hannem, 2013; Fox, 2015, 2016 and 2017; Wilson, 2011).

From the beginning of the process, the Primrose volunteers believed their support extended beyond the everyday issues of helping with the practicalities of ordinary life. Support included expanding the core members’ horizons by introducing them to different interests and hobbies, such as, cooking, football, running and music and art appreciation. This view was encouraged by the Primrose co-ordinator who spent time matching core member and volunteer interests. This was very evident in Circle 2 where two of the volunteers’ interest in cooking was a consideration in allocating them to that circle. Their core member, Tad, had indicated that he wanted to be a chef (Circle 2 case file). Some of the volunteers felt that sharing their own particular passions and interests with the core member meant that they could help enhance and enrich his life. This was highlighted by one of the volunteers in Circle 2 in their first focus group after a discussion about what hobbies they could share with their

core member:

"I can see how helping them develop can be a joyful experience, especially when you are involved in their life, having a part to play in their development, however small." C2Vol4

This expansion of human capital is highlighted as a positive objective in much of the desistance from crime literature (McNeill, 2006). However, such development without long term opportunities to pursue these interests can have detrimental effects which negate the initial benefits. This is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Practical and Emotional Support

As with other CoSAs, those within Primrose Project had to navigate many issues of support (Bates *et al*, 2012; Clarke *et al.*, 2015; McCartan *et al.*, 2014; McCartan, 2016). The Primrose volunteers encountered problems with housing and social security benefits, drug misuse and debts. However, they also met with issues which were unique to the Primrose core members due to their age and learning disability. These included issues of bullying and isolation at school, familial disharmony in which the core member had a child's status and behaviour and developmental problems associated with the core members' cognitive difficulties. The Primrose volunteers recognised that practical support would be part of their role and several of the circles helped their core members with form completion, housing and benefit problems, drafting CV's, bicycle repairs and accessing educational courses. However, what may not have been obvious from the outset of the programme was that these problems often led to unexpected emotional support requirements.

An example of this was in Circle 1 when Joe was charged with a joint enterprise theft related offence. He had been present when one of his 'friends' committed an offence. Joe maintained that he did not know what his friend had intended to do, but had merely been walking down the street with him. The volunteers supported Joe through his court appearance. One volunteer agreed to go to court to with Joe to support him through the legal process. Whilst she was familiar with the practical elements of this undertaking, she had not anticipated

the extent of the emotional input she would have to provide. She was conversant with court proceedings. However, it was not as simple as sitting in the public gallery or guiding him through the process. She had to persuade him to attend court, when his key workers had failed. She repeatedly telephoned him, cajoling him out of bed and eventually persuaded him that it was in his best interest to come to court. She was able to do this despite the fact he found such environments intimidating and confusing and he was convinced that he would be found guilty. She coached him through his decision on how to plead and the implications of judicial recommendations and comments. She did all this in a way he could engage with. Her support was not merely a practical application of her previous professional experience, but the forging of an emotional connection. She highlights this alien position when discussing her experience of breakfast before court, an enticement she used to get him back to court after the first day:

"I was sitting in there while he was eating this huge breakfast, and he said to me: "Will you butter my toast for me?" I thought it was quite funny a man of [age] asking me to butter his [toast]." C1Vol1

Joe trusted the volunteer to advise him and acknowledged his concerns about the court case, concluding that his life was "*shit*" (C1Vol1). As highlighted here, she managed to persuade him to deal with his present situation, use this incident as a positive experience and believe that it was in his power to change his life:

"I said: "Well let's just deal with this, let's just forget all the other things, let's work on this one thing now" ... And after it was all over I said to him: "Now I want you to think, just try and think how you feel now it's gone away ... you've done brilliantly because you came and it worked." C1Vol1

In desistance and therapeutic terms, the volunteer was able to "carry the hope" for the core member (McNeill, 2009: 27). The court case was considered by the other volunteers in Circle 1 as a turning point in the circle. Before this event, the core member had resisted their attempts to form a relationship. However, as highlighted by another volunteer in an interview at the end of the circle, he felt that the non-judgemental support they had been able to provide during this time

made a difference to their relationship:

“And I think through C1Vol1’s intervention with the judge and support[ing] him through court, I think he realised who is on his side and who is not.”

C1Vol4

As suggested above, practical support could become more demanding due to issues connected with the core members’ learning disabilities. For example in Circle 3, the volunteers were surprised to learn of their core member’s lack of understanding of his licence conditions. This was discussed in their final focus group when they were reflecting on the achievements of their circle:

“It took months before we realised that he didn’t really understand [his licence conditions] other than I have to stay in this area, he didn’t get the rest of it” C3Vol2

The geographical limitations of his licence conditions meant that he had to negotiate a procedural process to waive these limitations (for a brief period) to visit his parents for Christmas. This triggered not only anxiety in respect of processing the requisite application, but also caused reflection on why his family, particularly his father, would not visit him at the hostel. His father had chosen to deny his son’s sexually harmful behaviour and visiting the hostel would have challenged this denial (Circle 3 case file). Therefore, the volunteers’ supportive role necessitated that they not only had to carefully explain and re-explain the licence restrictions, but also manage the emotional response due to a greater understanding of their implications. Implications which Alex found emotionally difficult to process and respond to.

After a certain amount of time and exposure to the core members and their lives, the Primrose volunteers began to acknowledge that certain goals or objectives, despite their apparent simplicity, needed considerable support and patience. This meant that they had to re-evaluate their understanding of what could be achieved and supported given the core member’s circumstances and disabilities. This was highlighted in the second focus group for Circle 3. Here the volunteer is acknowledging that goal setting was difficult as it was conceptually problematic for Alex. She also recognised the disparity between Alex’s anticipated and actual skill levels:

“Yeah, that could have been that my expectations were not right, and also it took, it was almost like we had to back off and see what his skills were, which weren’t really a lot.” C3Vol2

Therefore in terms of adaptations, the volunteers recognised issues that required support had to be dealt with at a pace and in a manner which was appropriate for the core member. This was often slower and more repetitive than they would have perhaps expected. Moreover, the Primrose volunteers recognised that in order to support their core members they had to forge a real connection so that they were able to engage and build the essential trusting relationship. Only this type of relationship could motivate the core member to open up to the volunteers so that they could connect with the more emotional and important support issues. This could include the fact that his life was “*shit*” or that his father had no real continuing connection with him. The forging of these relationships took considerable time, perseverance and commitment. However, it could be argued that although this was difficult, the fact that the core member was young and had a learning disability meant that the Primrose volunteers felt that the additional support was justified.

From a policy perspective, this would suggest that every CoSA for a young person with a learning disability would be very different depending upon not only the needs of the core members, but also their cognitive abilities. Therefore, CoSAs for those with learning disabilities could not follow formulaic precedents and would be unlikely to neatly fit within the traditional CoSA processes.

Consistency, Security and Trust

The nature of the support offered by the Primrose volunteers was felt to be important. The volunteers considered it fundamental to establish a consistent framework in which to work. Consistent support was discussed in several Primrose circles. The value placed upon consistency was highlighted when the volunteers from Circle 4 discussed their circle’s lack of consistency. Volunteer absence was a problem for Circle 4 which resulted in meetings having to be cancelled at the last moment. The volunteers suggested (in a second focus group discussion) that this non-attendance was internalised by both Charlie and his mother with negative implications:

“It’s just difficult to make them feel that it is not their fault that people haven’t turned up” C4Vol2

Two of the original Circle 4 volunteers also reflected, in their final focus group, that one of their regrets was the lack of consistency in their circle (due to these absences). They felt that it had hindered the progress of their circle. This was because the consistent nature of the support offered was vital to ensure that Charlie and his mother felt secure in their relationship with the volunteers. It was this security and consistency that enabled the volunteers to broach difficult subjects and provide the core member with sufficient faith in the volunteers’ non-judgemental response to be able to engage with these subjects.

The value of consistency was also stated in Circle 1’s second focus group when all volunteers maintained the importance of not only a consistent presence, but also, *“a consistent message”* (C1Vol1/Vol3). However, in this focus group, consistency was not merely to provide support for the core member, but was also considered a supporting mechanism for the volunteers. It provided the volunteers with stability and consensus in a model that carries a considerable degree of risk. This will be explored further in Chapter 7 on risk when discussing volunteer autonomy.

All the Primrose volunteers worked hard to provide an environment in which the core member could feel: *“safe”* (C2Vol4, C4Vol4); *“respected”* (C3Vol3, C1Vol4); *“not judged”* (C1Vol2, C2Vol4, C3Vol3, C4Vol1) and supported. This provided a secure and consistent social relationship based on trust and understanding, something I would argue that the Primrose core members had little experience of. In these relationships, the volunteers offered support, but allowed the core member the opportunity to evaluate, discuss and either reject or accept any volunteer proposals. Several of the Primrose volunteers highlighted that they were not there to tell their core members what to do, that they offered suggestions and advice, but did not dictate or prohibit. Therefore their support did not preclude the core member from appraising and, if desired, rejecting the advice:

“he knew exactly what to expect from [us] ... and then once he knew what to expect through that consistency he chose either to take it or not, engage with it or not.” C1Vol4

The volunteers in Circle 1 felt that they had provided sufficient security for Joe to make changes in his life. In their second focus group, they suggested that they were there to offer a consistent, non-judgemental environment in which he could explore options and make decisions. They suggested this also helped him think about his own identity and his life going forward:

“With secure attachments and a positive relationship, they then sort of allow themselves a bit of self-worth. [Joe] had a troubled existence, he was quite a tortured soul in the sense that he didn’t quite know who he wanted to be, what he wanted to be, but he didn’t want to be a thug, he didn’t want to go to jail” C1Vol3

The above comments suggest that the volunteers recognised the issues faced by Joe were not solely of his making. The volunteers had been able to see Joe within his social, economic and environmental context. Therefore they were able to view him as a person and not merely an individual who had exhibited sexually harmful behaviour or a set of risk factors (Judd and Lewis, 2015: 69). Moving away from the offender label enabled the volunteers to trust their core member and promote the development of “agentic resolve” (Panuccio *et al.*, 2012:136).

Such discussions often involved the core member’s possible responses to others, in particular, those who were either harassing or bullying them. In the past Primrose core members sometimes responded to such situations violently or aggressively, but in the CoSA meetings behaviour alternatives were suggested and discussed. This point is further discussed later in this chapter and Chapter 7 on risk. By acting in such a way, the volunteers were able to promote core member agency by implying that they believed him capable of making his own pro-social decisions (McNeill, 2009). This is highlighted in this Circle 3 volunteer’s comment in a second focus group:

“I don’t think we have ever said to him you must not. It’s just all support, and it’s not you should have ... It’s never been finger pointing or telling him what to do.” C3Vol2

As with other community assisted schemes, this encouragement of agency was not merely borne out of respect, but also an acknowledgement that the core members were capable of leading a positive and productive life (Hucklesby and

Wincup, 2014: 388). However, gradually the Primrose volunteers began to recognise that the advice given to the core member needed to accommodate issues arising from the core member's learning disabilities. One such issue was the restricted nature of the core member's world, in both a physical and emotional sense. The Primrose volunteers were often surprised at the core member's reticence to engage in new experiences. As was suggested by one of Circle 2's volunteers in their second focus group when they discussed their core members use of public transport prior to engagement with the circle:

"[Tad] never really went outside his area of [location]" C2Vol3

Tad had to be encouraged and helped to try different modes of public transport, thereby giving him access to a greater geographical area. However, he was only persuaded to try an alternative when there was an incident on his usual route. This expansion in both geography and mode of transport was seen as one of Circle 2's successes.

This recognition of the core member's fear of the unknown was echoed by a volunteer in Circle 1. She talked about how she could not persuade Joe to undertake an assessment; *"his comfort zone is so tiny, it really is limited"* (C1Vol1). This assessment was to highlight his need for support in his court case, but because he would be asked sensitive questions and was in an unfamiliar location the volunteer could not persuade him to go. This was despite the fact she had offered to go with him. I would also argue that for Joe this decision was influenced by his previous negative and intrusive experiences with professionals and assessments. This professional/core member experience is discussed further in this chapter, and the following chapter on accountability.

This meant that decisions made by the Primrose core members had to be viewed in accordance with not only their limited social and difficult economic contexts, but also the effect their learning disability and associated coping strategies had, and continued to have, on their lives. These limitations not only challenged the volunteers' personal social constructions, but highlighted that CoSAs for young people with learning disabilities should have different core member agency expectations. The Primrose volunteers learnt to view small (perhaps unremarkable by some standards) shows of agency as encouraging. This is shown in this extract (from a second focus group) where the volunteers

were discussing how far Tad had come. They appreciated the fact that he was now able to; *“think about what it is he wants to do and express preferences ... he picked the restaurant”* (C2Vol4). Therefore, the volunteer expectations of the core member’s abilities needed to be set early on in the CoSA process and reinforced throughout. Such adapted expectations help when setting CoSA goals and lessens potential volunteer disappointment. Höing *et al.* (2016a: 376) also discussed the setting of volunteer expectations suggesting that it may help limit volunteer “burnout”. This is highlighted again in Chapter 7 on risk.

Support and Accountability

By the second set of focus groups, many of the volunteers had devised internal strategies for dealing with their concerns about the possible friction between accountability and support. They suggested that when difficult issues were discussed, they adopted a more pseudo educative and reciprocal manner, so they did not appear negative or judgemental. This is suggested in this extract from a co-ordinator interview when discussing how Circle 3’s volunteers were managing their circle:

“In Alex’s circle everybody was working to help him to live according to his licence conditions and, you know build a new life for himself ... help managing living with that conviction and moving beyond it and the better equipped he is socially, educationally, workwise, skills wise the more likely he is not to reoffend.” (Jackie)

The volunteers also drew connections between support and accountability. They suggested that by discussing issues which had the potential to lead to further problems for the core member they were using their accountability responsibility in a supportive manner. This meant that when discussing problems, the volunteers would explore alternatives and outcomes with the core member. This frequently meant that they explored common problematic emotions, such as anger, and discussed how to manage such feelings in a more controlled and safe manner. An example of this was discussed in Circle 2’s second focus group when the volunteers spoke about their core member being bullied at school:

“We talked through how he was thinking of responding ... we talked through with him some of the ways he could maybe explain what had happened and how he could get his point of view across, and does he want anyone to go with him? But he was really, really kind of aware of the need to deal with it and the fact that he had a lot to lose by being violent or aggressive.” C2Vol4

This issue is revisited as a successful example of risk management in Chapter 7 on risk.

Once established within the Primrose CoSA process, the volunteers did not view this intersection of accountability and support as problematic. This was primarily due to the development of a relationship of trust. The volunteers believed that once the core member trusted them they could justify these lines of enquiry. They believed that the core member would know they were genuinely concerned and that his welfare was the reason for the questioning. Enquiries made by the volunteers appeared to be focused almost entirely on ensuring the wellbeing of the core member. Even the discussion about Alex’s licence restrictions, in Circle 3, were seen as supportive rather than restrictive. This was because the volunteers framed it in terms of preventing him getting him into trouble by breaching the conditions.

This way of viewing accountability may be different to traditional CoSAs which may be due, in part, to the Primrose Project’s management team grounding in therapeutic and social care philosophies. One of Primrose’s co-ordinators highlighted this, stating:

“I think we talk about [support and accountability] in different ways to how more mainstream circles talk about them, because [when] they talk about them overwhelmingly the language is much more about risk management rather than developing and fostering a relationship, but that is to do with the difference of approach not that we prioritise support, over accountability actually. I think it is quite detrimental to the model actually to make it sound as though it is so much around risk management you know ... to me [it’s] actually about helping.” (Jackie)

When asked in their final focus groups, most Primrose volunteers felt that their circles had been primarily supportive. However, in the case of Circle 3, this

issue was one of considerable reflection. The volunteers eventually concluded that whilst they had done a lot of work on accountability, it had been undertaken in a supportive manner. This was Alex's circle, he was the oldest core member and the only one to have been convicted of an offence. Furthermore, two of Circle 3's volunteers had professional roles in the criminal justice system. Therefore for them the concept of accountability may have had greater importance than for the other Primrose volunteers, even if it was administered in a more natural and sympathetic manner.

It could be argued that the Primrose CoSAs reprioritised or repositioned support over accountability, unlike some traditional UK CoSAs (Thomas *et al.*, 2014). This could have been a natural evolution of the model promoted by the core member's age and cognitive abilities or the distancing of the Primrose CoSAs from the criminal justice system. It could also have been an intentional, albeit instinctive, adaptation on the part of both the Primrose management team and volunteers. This would ensure the development of a relationship of trust rather than one of shame (an issue further discussed in Chapter 6 on accountability) (Braithwaite and Braithwaite, 2001; McAlinden, 2007). In addition to this shame management consideration, the Primrose volunteers were willing to recognise that their core members were vulnerable and disadvantaged, like many young people caught up in the criminal justice system (Day and Ward, 2010; Porteous *et al.*, 2015). They knew their core members came from disadvantaged backgrounds and were often victims of abuse and neglect. Therefore support could be justifiably selected as the main concept as these core members were, young, disabled, disadvantaged and victims themselves. Furthermore, they did not fit the profile of the stereotypical sex offender and therefore were implicitly seen as more deserving of extra support. All of the above factors will no doubt have resulted in a more welfare driven implementation of the model which was further enhanced by the Primrose Project being distanced from criminal justice influences (Healy, 2012).

This also suggests that the Primrose CoSAs did not have high risk core members. It may have been implicitly recognised that low risk individuals do not always benefit from rigid inclusion in certain programmes and adaptation is fundamental to better suit the needs of those involved. Therefore using a creative common sense approach to the Risk Needs Responsivity proposition.

Non Professional Support

The issue of the volunteers not being paid professionals was a strong theme in my research. It appears in both this chapter and Chapter 6 on accountability. The Primrose volunteers felt they were able to offer a different kind of support to that of paid professionals. They stressed that whilst they may have used some of their professional skills to support their core member (i.e. access to knowledge about programmes and benefits), they were offering something quite unique. As one volunteer from Circle 4 (in a second focus group) stated:

“We are not professionals, we are just people who are there to volunteer. We are not there to give them a professional opinion. We are not there to analyse them or judge them or make them do things that they don’t want to do. We are just there for, an informal kind of support and sort of help them through things.” C4Vol1

It is particularly in the context of ‘boundaries’ that the professional/non-professional nature of support can be seen. Boundaries for the purpose of this discussion is the limitation the volunteers placed on their time, personal information and emotional involvement. At the beginning of a Primrose CoSA and in training, personal boundaries and safe-guarding were much discussed topics by the volunteers. At the beginning of the process, some Primrose volunteers seemed to be confused as to how they would manage their boundaries, whilst many felt that the early establishment of boundaries was important in offering the core member; *“clarity [and] consistency” (C2Vol4)*

Some were concerned that if such boundaries were not fixed and established at the outset, there would be a possibility of becoming too emotionally involved and thereby unable to fulfil their role within the project. So despite some confusion there seemed to be a consensus that boundaries were there to protect them and the core member, as indicated here, by a volunteer in Circle 2 in the first focus group;

“I think like all people, [for] young people with learning disabilities structure and expectations are really important ... it does not help if

someone is a bit emotionally all over the place and you're not consistent with how you interact with them." C2Vol4

The negotiation of what boundaries were acceptable appeared to suggest implications for the relationship between the core member and the volunteers. Some Primrose volunteers worried about retaining an almost professional relationship with a degree of distance. This was acknowledged by a volunteer in Circle 3 (in their first focus group) when he highlighted a concern after listening to a presentation given by a volunteer who had completed a circle:

"[They] went to their core member's 21st birthday, they invited him to their home for supper ... I am not sure I would do that. My natural inclination would be to keep slightly more distant than that." C3Vol3

This struggle with what was the correct level of involvement could have been due to the fact that many of the Primrose volunteers' professional roles outside the CoSA required a degree of detachment. This was particularly true of the volunteers who had legal and clinical backgrounds and was specifically voiced by the older members of this group.

However, by the second set of focus groups, the Primrose volunteers had begun to recognise that their boundaries and the support they could offer may change over time. This evolved organically on both a group and individual level and was dependent on the core members' needs. This was true of even those who worked within the criminal justice system with sex offenders who had very strict professionally constructed boundaries. Those volunteers who started their circles with quite rigid boundaries changed and relaxed in all but one case. This volunteer (C1Vol4) started the process with an understanding of his boundaries and these did not change throughout the circle:

"I have very clear boundaries and I stuck by them. I decided I wasn't going to give Joe my telephone number and my contact with Joe will be through the [the Primrose Project] or other members of the group. And for me it is essential otherwise I wouldn't be here, you know, because it would be too much of an involvement with his situation and I just didn't want that from the beginning and I was very clear." C1Vol4

It is difficult to establish why this volunteer maintained this view on personal boundaries. On observing his interaction with both the other volunteers and the core member in his circle, he appeared to remain on the periphery of the community. He appeared not to engage fully with either the volunteers or Joe, occasionally referring to him as a “thug”. I would suggest that the relationship he formed with Joe was at best one of teacher/student. Therefore the social relationship never developed and boundaries did not need to be re-evaluated.

In the main, the initial concern for the volunteers had been how to manage the core member’s personal access to them and whether that would result in them being on call 24/7. Their worry was that such unfettered access would add a greater level of risk resulting in them being drawn into uncomfortable and ‘risky’ situations. However, this fear appeared to be unfounded. The Primrose core members infrequently contacted the volunteers outside the circle and if they did it was usually for purely administrative reasons, such as confirming a meeting date. One of the volunteers remarked that giving the volunteer her mobile number made her recognise his lack of experience with simple social activities (for example, sending and responding to texts) and that this was valuable skill for him to learn. Furthermore, it was suggested that there were benefits to extending core member and volunteer communication, as highlighted by a volunteer in Circle 4:

“[I]t might be that you arrange for something directly with them, it would be good for them as well, because it would help them sort of become more independent.” C4Vol6

Therefore the willingness to adapt boundaries was a skill that the volunteers had to continuously negotiate and assess. This negotiation was done with reference to their trust in their core member ensuring that their relationship remained one in which they could both comfortably and productively support their core member without incurring too much risk.

Despite the volunteers’ initial reservations, many of them freely disclosed personal information to the core member. In some circles, the information was used as a form of experience sharing exercise. These exercises not only showed a willingness to forge a bond with common experiences, but also implied a degree of empathy with the core member’s situation. This was

particularly evident in Circle 4. Charlie was the youngest of the core members and, whether because of his age or learning disability, asking specific questions appeared to cause him considerable discomfort. However, the volunteers found that sharing similar experiences enabled him to talk naturally about difficult issues. This was highlighted by one of the volunteers at the end of their CoSA:

“We really put on the table things about our own families, C4Vol3 talked about his Dad, and I talked about my family issues, and I think everybody talked a little bit about those things so he wouldn’t feel [that he was] the weird one, because of all his problems.” C4Vol4

This two way communication was highlighted by volunteers in other Primrose circles as important, not merely as a device for conveying empathy or eliciting information, but also as a way of differentiating the type of relationship. This information sharing acknowledged in a very natural and understandable way that the relationship was reciprocal and therefore more social than professional.

This volunteer disclosure was discussed as beneficial in other CoSA studies (Thomas, *et al.*, 2014). It was also highlighted as valuable by Judd and Lewis (2015: 62) in their evaluation of successful relationships between probation officers and their clients as it fostered; “trust, empathy and genuineness”. Furthermore, according to McNeill (2009:28), the “human” as opposed to professional relationship plays a part in desistance suggesting that the value of desisting is most powerful when viewed through a meaningful relationship.

However, not all the volunteers deemed their circles social rather than professional. On reflection in their final focus group, the volunteers in Circle 3 highlighted the professional nature of their circle. This could have been because they spent much of their time focusing on Alex’s licence conditions and on what he could not do. Additionally, two volunteers in this circle worked within the criminal justice system. The volunteers in Circle 3 found it difficult to transition into the social phase (phase 2) of the CoSA process, preferring to maintain formal discursive meetings. It could be argued that the lack of social interaction meant that they retained a certain professional status, albeit not one of offender managers. This can be borne out by this comment from one of the volunteers in this circle:

“he maybe sees us as may be a little bit similar to the bike maintenance tutors or something like that” C3Vol2

Despite this professional quality, the volunteers did suggest that they were somehow different to other professionals as they were involved in a voluntary capacity, that they enjoyed his company and respected his opinions:

“It’s partly understanding that professionals have to be nice to you because they are getting paid and we were sort of a step down from that.” C3Vol2

Many of the Primrose volunteers suggested that the core members responded to the support they provided not only because it was given within a trusting and respectful relationship, but because those who offered it had no mandated reason for being involved with the circle. They suggested that their core member, after a period of time, realised that they were there to spend time with him and not to do a job. This wish to spend time with the core member did not appear to revolve around public safety, but a growing human response to a vulnerable person. As Fox (2016: 90) states there is something powerful about the non-professional relationships developed within circles as they situate the core member in communities which foster a sense of “belonging, normalcy and optimism.” The value of the volunteers working within the CoSAs on a voluntary basis was highlighted in earlier UK studies (Armstrong *et al*, 2008; Haslewood-Pócsik *et al.*, 2008) where the core members were said to appreciate the distinctive nature of support that the volunteers provided.

However, the impact of the voluntary non-professional nature of the volunteers may be different in the Primrose CoSAs. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3 and 5 on the parties and support, those with learning disabilities are familiar with many different types of professional/third party coming in and out of their lives. Therefore the distinction between the different types of “professional”, or merely someone else telling them what to do, may have been too subtle for the Primrose core members.

It should also be noted that there was limited evidence of the Primrose volunteers spending ‘social time’ with their core members. This was often related to the core member’s ‘comfort zone’, he was not comfortable with many social activities or venues. Individuals with learning disabilities often have only

limited exposure to social events with negligible participation. The volunteers had to build up their out-of-meeting activities slowly, factoring in the core members ability to cope with and enjoy new and different environments. Finance was another factor in the lack of social time spent in the circle as there were limited funds available for socialising. Finally, age was a further reason for limiting social activity. This was particularly evident for Charlie, who was under 18 years of age, socialising events had to be carefully tailored to include both him and his mother and factor in his age. His events, which were restricted, tended to be activity based (i.e. bowling) to cater for his abilities and need to be doing something physical.

The Value of the 'Group' in Support

At the outset of this programme, the majority of the volunteers involved in the Primrose CoSAs believed that one of the strengths of the CoSA was its group nature. It was cited as a reason for considering the CoSA programme a viable volunteering opportunity. This was because of the mutual support a group offered and its defusing nature with respect to relationships and responsibility. However, it was also suggested that the group structure would benefit the core member. Such benefit extended to more than just having numerous supporters.

Building Skills and Resolving Problems

Many volunteers felt that working within a group would expose the core member to different people with diverse perspectives and interests. This would not only alleviate their isolation, but would also give them access to a diverse group of personalities and experiences. When considering modified restorative circles, Walker (2009) argued there was considerable value in using a group of varied individuals within the circles. He suggested they were likely to be better than a group of criminal justice professionals as they were more likely to offer varied and innovative solutions to everyday problems. This was echoed by a volunteer in Circle 1 when reflecting on the effectiveness of the circle at the end of the process:

“I think it was very good being in a group and the fact that we all brought something slightly different, different life experience, and different perspectives ... and even though sometimes we wouldn’t all agree with something, we were able to give him different perspectives on what was happening in his life and I think that kind of enriched the whole experience, I think for both us and him.” C1Vol2

Like the volunteer above, other Primrose volunteers acknowledged that differing perspectives were useful although they could potentially give rise to disagreements. However, even such disagreements were considered beneficial as they could aid the core member’s development. This was highlighted by a volunteer in Circle 3’s first focus group:

“[we] could show the core member how to resolve conflicts without being cross or angry.”C3Vol4

It was further recognised that sometimes conflicts were not always as destructive as feared, but could help mitigate difficult situations by emphasising alternative responses. This was highlighted by a volunteer in Circle 1’s second focus group, where the volunteers suggested that Joe needed someone to rebel against:

*“If you think about what happened to him as a young man at the hands of [the main male care givers], it would probably be very hard for him to have a relationship [with an authoritarian father figure - volunteer]”
C1Vol2*

Therefore despite there being a degree of friction between the core member and the volunteer who represented a father figure, the other volunteers were able to offer alternative non-paternal suggestions. Joe was then able to consider these options more openly as he had already used up his standard response method with the authoritarian representative of the group. In this way they were able to understand not only behavioural patterns, but also how these patterns had developed in order to better support their core member (Hannem and Petrunik, 2007). Furthermore, as Judd and Lewis (2015: 62) found “ruptures” could be repaired, relationships were not irretrievably destroyed and compromises could be achieved. Therefore in this circle, they were able to use the rupture between one volunteer and the core member to encourage, after

initial vocal dismissal, consideration of different response alternatives. I would, however, suggest from my observation of this group that this resulted in a circle that was frequently off balance and where volunteers and co-ordinators were frequently seeking to repair rifts.

Another advantage of the group in the Primrose Project was that the core member not only discussed issues with the volunteers, but watched and listened to the volunteers interacting with each other, a type of social modelling (Trotter, 2009). Many volunteers felt that the group format was useful as it enabled them to model appropriate social behaviour and dispel certain social fears. When one of the volunteers in Circle 2 was asked about how she felt the group nature of the model worked, she stated:

"I think it is a good concept, I think it works well, um and I think particularly in our group where we have got two guys, and two girls, there is something different about how he might relate to us, and it is good to see us working together because I guess that model's about appropriate relationships. I think he has a lot of anxieties around girls and sees them as being quite different to himself, so it is nice to see that actually [we're not so different] ... we are all humans essentially." C2Vol5

This building of strong and trusting 'group' relationships not only expedited the work of the Primrose CoSA, but was also seen as a useful life skill that could be passed on to the core member. This would enable him to reuse this skill in other parts of his life, a part of the pro-social modelling benefit seen in not only the CoSA model, but other offender treatment and rehabilitation programmes (Armstrong and Willis, 2014; Fernandez *et al.*, 2006; Fox, 2015 and 2016; McCartan, 2016; Thomas *et al.*, 2014; Trotter, 2009). Fox, (2015: 88) and Walker (2009) suggest that this type of learning, through observation, potentially reinforces a sense of autonomy and is essential to ensuring a better understand the social world. Additionally this mode of developing understanding is better for those with learning disabilities as such skills are more likely to be remembered through a process real experience and repetition (Craig, *et al.*, 2006: 386).

A Community

Despite the Primrose volunteers' acknowledgement that they were initially a group of strangers, there was a suggestion in Circle 4's first focus groups that, not unlike those who initially came from the same faith background, the volunteers shared certain commonalities:

"We are from different backgrounds, but we are all here because we want to be here, because we are interested in this particular project. It makes us open minded people and willing to learn new things ... so I think this will make it easier working as a group." C4Vol4

This common purpose seemed to imply that they would not only be able to support their core member, but also each other. It would therefore appear to be important that the volunteers were able to support each other and to this end the Primrose co-ordinators spent considerable time matching their volunteers and core members. The Primrose co-ordinators endeavoured where possible to achieve the appropriate mix of ages, genders, ethnicities and interests to ensure a supportive circle. They implicitly recognised the benefits of having volunteer and core member commonalities as detailed in Chapter 3 on the parties (Spencer, 2007; Garraway and Pistrang, 2010). In most cases, it would appear that they were successful in achieving a cohesive group and a degree of community. All Primrose volunteers said they got on well together. This strong dynamic between the volunteers was very important as it enabled them to support and share difficult issues within their circles. This was particularly evident at the beginning of Circle 1 when Joe would not engage with the volunteers. He did not turn up to meetings and, if he did, he was frequently "stoned" C1Vol3. This could have been very disheartening and possibly personally hurtful. However, Helen felt that the group dynamic was such that it enabled them to jointly justify Joe's behaviour and better understand his needs and background:

"So I think they are able to intellectually rationalise it very well and I think they are enjoying each other [it] makes them emotionally have fun with it. The only thing I have heard from them is that they are worried about him if he does not show up because he is so vulnerable and wonder how he is." (Helen)

Most volunteers reflected that they not only enjoyed working with each other, but that the group dynamic of the circle made their support more effective. Through the group they were able to emphasise their belief in the core member and the model. It fostered a degree of inclusivity and recognition that all members of the circle were equal contributors. Additionally, the core member was recognised as part of the group, he had a voice and was an integral to the process as was suggested by a volunteer in Circle 1 in their final focus group:

“I think that the idea of the group as well is that then everyone is part of it, it is not a me and him, ... I suppose the core member can actually feel much more included ... rather than, this is what I am telling you to do as [your] social worker or your doctor” C1Vol3

This relationship within a type of community appeared to allow both the core member and volunteers the ability to address the problems and changes which arose within their circle, for example a change in circle personnel. Circles 2 and 4 had volunteers that left and joined midway through the circle lifecycle. Initially the remaining volunteers felt that this may be a problem. However, when it actually happened they all acknowledged that core member responded well to the replacement. This possibly highlighted the cohesiveness of the community/group. They were able to respond to and weather changes without causing an irredeemable rift. This would have been very different in a one to one mentoring type model possibly showing the supportive and enduring nature of the group.

It should also be noted that the Primrose volunteer and core member relationship was not the only relationship within the circles. The Primrose co-ordinators also had relationships with the core members, his family (where there was one) and his key workers. The co-ordinator initiated the core member into the circle (as described in Chapter 4 in the methodology) and remained a constant presence throughout the circle lifecycle. The relationship between the Primrose co-ordinator and core members was personal and supportive rather than purely administrative and one that took considerable time to establish. This is possibly a further adaption of the existing CoSA model and was very much a

result of the core members' cognitive abilities and the Primrose Project's philosophy.

The strength of core member and co-ordinator relationship was commented on by one of the volunteers in Circle 2 when questioned (in their second focus group) about the effect of the departure of a volunteer from their circle:

"I think he will find it more difficult with [Helen] gone because he had a really good relationship with [Helen] and [Helen] in the beginning [would] go to his house and bring him here and he does ask sometimes about [Helen]." C2Vol4

From my observation of the Primrose CoSAs within this research project this relationship was not limited to Helen and Tad, but was true of all the co-ordinators and their respective Primrose core members.

It should also be noted here that the community nature of the Primrose CoSAs was not limited only to those within the inner circle. These circles drew in core member family members and third party professionals and other members of their communities. Greater community involvement was encouraged by the volunteers recommending their volunteering experience to their family, friends and colleagues. Volunteer recommendation is highlighted in Chapter 4 on methodology as a fruitful method of recruitment for the Primrose Project.

Isolation, Social Support and Social Capital

Isolation, in particular, the lack of social interaction, was recognised by all parties within the Primrose CoSAs as a considerable issue. They believed that the CoSA model had the potential of, albeit partially, addressing this problem. This was highlighted by a volunteer from Circle 2, in their second focus groups:

"I think [the circle] has given him a forum in which he can speak to people on a social level. I think that's one of the things he struggled with. He feels quite isolated in his life so, I think having us to speak to at least once a week has helped him with that. C2Vol3

This was not a one-off comment. All the Primrose volunteers felt that their circle had provided the core member with access to friendly non-professional individuals and that this had lessened his isolation.

Many participants of the Primrose Project suggested that the core members' isolation issues were not due to their harmful behaviour history, but as a result of their personal circumstances and backgrounds. This included their learning disabilities and lack of socialisation skills. The volunteers felt that for some core members their lack of ability and opportunity to connect or interact with others meant that they remained generally isolated and without positive personal social networks. This was highlighted by a volunteer in Circle 1 in the final focus group:

“He is incredibly on the margins ... he hasn't got a positive experience of relationships, he didn't really know how to relate to people except in a very sort of detached way.” C1Vol1

'Friendship' for the Primrose core members was an elusive concept and they were frequently exploited and bullied by those they tried to nurture as friends. This was evidenced by the focus group and interview discussions and the case files on all four circles. This topic is discussed further in Chapter 7 on risk as the subject of external friendships was often seen by the Primrose volunteers as a risk factor. It was considered a dominant risk factor in Circles 1 and 3 and negative friendships were experienced and discussed by all four core members within the circle lifecycle.

The question of what sort of social relationship volunteers had with their core member and whether their relationship could be called one of 'friendship' was considered in this and other CoSA studies (Armstrong and Wills, 2014; Chouinard and Riddick, 2014; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). Whilst not all of the Primrose volunteers believed themselves to be the core member's friends, they did recognise that they had developed a type of social relationship. In Circle 1 the volunteers suggested they had evolved into a familial type relationship (this is discussed further in chapter 6 on Accountability). In Circle 4 it was a supportive relationship in which the volunteers not only engaged with the core member's behavioural issues, but also his relationship with his mother (as will be discussed below). In Circle 3 they developed a quasi-professional

relationship (as highlighted previously in this chapter). Almost all the Primrose volunteers believed that this relationship, to some degree, helped mitigate the issue of isolation as was highlighted by a Circle 2 volunteer in their second focus group, when talking about the circle:

“It definitely reduced his isolation ... he did not really have any outside contact, just his family and school and both of those kind of settings he had had real negative experiences with, so it was really nice for him to get out and make friends and have companions. He always said it was something that he looked forward to coming to and doing activities, just little things like that I think make a really big difference.” C2Vol4

It was within Circle 2 that the volunteers acknowledged their relationship was one of mutual friendship. This friendship was possibly facilitated by the volunteers being of a relatively similar age to the core member, which was different to the other circles in the Primrose Project. This not only promoted certain age related commonalities (for example, going or having just gone through similar life experiences), but also meant that they were able to successfully socialise outside the formal meeting environment. This was noted in their second focus group:

“I think that he kind of sees us as friends or companions. I think through the year we’ve developed a real sense of a group dynamic companionship ... it often does feel like a friendship group especially when we go out and do activities” C2Vol4

This relationship remained constant despite the later introduction of more risk based discussions via a new volunteer (C2Vol 5) who was as a criminal justice professional:

“Since she came we still have a relationship of friendship and it is a good place.” C2Vol2

The Circle 2 volunteers felt that the circle was still working and functioning well, despite the changes, because they had spent time initially developing such a relationship.

Both the Primrose management team and the volunteers acknowledged the importance of family connections and the associated social capital advantages

for their core members. Furthermore, they recognised that the circle had a role in facilitating the continuance and possible improvement in these relationships. This may be true for any core member, but has particular resonance for those with learning disabilities who have limited opportunities for expanding their already meagre social capital reserves (Ellem et al., 2012). Within the Primrose Project these familial relationships were viewed as especially important due to both the core member's age and vulnerabilities. All the Primrose circles worked on family relationships, and in Circle 4, Charlie's mother was often included in the circle meetings. One of the main objectives in this circle was to encourage mother and son to effectively communicate with each other. The following extract from a volunteer in Circle 4 (second focus group) highlights how the volunteer believed their intervention had helped improve the mother and son relationship:

"He was getting along a lot better with his Mum and they were able to openly discuss things and they weren't talking over each other, that was one of our aims actually. We managed to get that done pretty well."

C4Vol1

This statement was confirmed by the core member who told Jackie (at the end of the circle) that having his mother in the circle meant that he now got on with her better (Circle 4 case file). Whilst the link between family ties and desistance were not overtly recognised in the Primrose Project, the volunteers did appreciate the stability and support that such ties provided (McNeill 2009; Farrall, 2004). They recognised that limited or reduced contact would have a detrimental effect upon the core member, especially with his already meagre social capital. The benefits of family relationships were acknowledged even if the relationship was not perfect and fostered problematic issues. An example of this was in Circle 3, where Alex's family encouraged him to deny or excuse his previous sexually harmful behaviour. The volunteers felt this could have worrying reoffending repercussions, yet continued to encourage him to nurture this relationship.

The core members' social capital was extended not only through their familial relationships, but was also through the relationships they had with the Primrose management team and the volunteers. Both the Primrose co-ordinator and the volunteers acted as an advocate on the core members behalf. This has been

highlighted earlier when a volunteer (C1Vol1) attended court with Joe. The volunteer was seen by the judge as a supporter of the core member. Support via advocacy was also evident in CoSA review meetings where the volunteers were able to use their professional skills and social standing in the core member's favour. In these meetings, other external professionals (for example social workers and psychologists) appeared to be favourably influenced by the fact that there were other professionals willing to support the core member (Circle 3 case file). I observed that external professionals appeared to be impressed by such a person unemotionally recalling the virtues and highlighting the problems of the core member. It gave greater resonance to the points being made. This advocacy also enhanced the core member's emotional reserves (Healy, 2012), as it showed that someone had faith in his abilities (as with the above mentioned court case). This advocacy also benefitted any attending family member as it strengthened their positions and, to a limited extent, mitigated their feelings of associated isolation and marginalisation (Circle 4 case file).

Socialisation, Integration and Reintegration

The Primrose volunteers spent considerable time supporting and enhancing both the core member's social abilities and those practical skills which promoted social activities (for example, using public transport). The CoSA process recognises the value of enhanced socialisation by encouraging the parties to leave the formal meeting-room environment and take on more social activities. This introduces the core members to arenas and situations that can improve social abilities and further integration. In the Primrose Project such departure from the formal environment was carefully planned to ensure that the core member did not experience excessive anxiety, possibly not something necessary in traditional circles. Often events were repeated to enable a social venue experience within the comfort of familiar surroundings. The circles went to cafes/restaurants, museums, art galleries and bowling. These experiences may appear unremarkable, but even simple actions such as a texting or telephoning were felt to be empowering as highlighted here, by a Circle 2 volunteer in their second focus group:

"We have done lots, well not lots, but things that he hasn't done otherwise, ... Just simple things like I don't know how much he does talk to people by text and does arrange to meet people." C2Vol4

In the Primrose Project, support and social integration dovetailed because so many of the integration skills required considerable emotional support. Volunteers in all four CoSAs reported improvements in many social areas. An example of this was in the final event of Circle 4's CoSA. It was a special event to celebrate the ending of the circle and Charlie was asked to choose what he would like to do. He said he wanted to go bowling again. The first time he had gone bowling he ended the evening angry and frustrated because he had not won. He was particularly competitive and felt that boys should be able to win any sporting events. He had been rude to the female volunteer who won and was generally unpleasant. However, on their second visit he was very different. He told Jackie that he wanted to show he had changed and spent much of his time helping others with their bowling techniques. He said he had enjoyed second bowling outing, he had not got cross because he had lost, but liked trying to help others improve their game (Circle 4 case file).

Most Primrose volunteers acknowledged that as their core member's communication skills and confidence grew, he began to voice preferences and lead discussions. As the core members' developed in confidence they started to talk in meetings and began to bring things to meetings to share with the volunteers, such as newspaper cuttings and art work. Charlie would spend the previous evening packing his bag with games he wanted to play with the volunteers (Circle 4 case file). This sharing was particularly true of Alex who enjoyed drawing, which led him to not only bring his art work into circle meetings, but to venture to exhibitions and galleries with the volunteers (Circle 3 case file). This was Alex's response when asked whether he felt the circle helped him:

"Yeah it has given me my confidence and brought me out of my shell as well." (Alex)

Many Primrose volunteers also commented that the core member had gained sufficient confidence to start asking questions of the volunteers. This is evidenced by this Circle 2 volunteer:

“I think he likes to see himself as one of us. It is not a one way process with him so he often asks us questions about; “oh what have you done at the weekend?” “What’s happening with you guys?”” C2Vol4

This familiarity was extended in some groups to the instigation of socially appropriate greetings which involved a degree of physical contact, as stated by this volunteer in Circle 1 in their final focus group:

“He actually started shaking people’s hands” C1Vol3.

This shows how actions and responses, often taken for granted due to social education, needed to be learnt and shared. If greetings are uncomfortable because of others reactions, they will be avoided which has the potential to create an enduring barrier. Therefore, something as simple and subtle as shaking hands has the potential of creating socialisation opportunities. This confirms the point made by Cesarioni (2001: 95) that the circle’s importance is considerable, particularly in the appropriate and continuing socialisation of the core member. Furthermore, as highlighted by Hannem and Petrunik (2007:164) instigating and actively receiving such social tokens strengthen the inclusiveness of the core member.

However, what did concern the Primrose volunteers was what would happen to their core member after the circle had finished and whether they would be able to achieve any goals or objectives set in their CoSA. As highlighted earlier, progress often seemed small and inconsequential. The Primrose core members’ issues, like those highlighted by Hucklesby and Wincup (2014: 381) in their study on mentoring, were “complex” and often meant that any targets or aspirations had to be reformulated or abandoned. This was highlighted by two volunteers from Circle 3 in their final focus group when they were asked about their circle’s objectives:

“He didn’t have any goals, we kind of looked for them.” C3Vol2

“I was never quite sure how we could be expected to achieve some of the things we wanted to achieve with him, because he did not know about his future and what that would look like in terms of where he was going to live, or how long he would be supervised for.” C3Vol1

However, the greatest concern for the Primrose volunteers on the ending of their circles was not the non-achievement of goals, but was how the core member would cope without their support. The Primrose management team acknowledged, as had been stressed by Hucklesby and Wincup (2014: 381), that “an exit strategy [was] vital.” Over the period of the Primrose Project, it was recognised that the ending of the circle had to happen in a structured manner. All the Primrose circles spent time working with their core members ensuring that the final months led to a safe and structured conclusion. They paid particular attention to ensuring that the core member was in contact with other support agencies, trying to help him to feel sufficiently secure and confident with his new avenues of support. They also spent time explaining to their core members why the circles had to end, using it as a pro-social learning experience. All worked with the core members to reassure them that endings were natural events which did not necessarily have negative connotations, it was not a rejection. This was a further adaptation of the CoSA model again, in part, connected to the core member’s learning disability and their reliance on third party professional support. This also highlights the importance, as recognised by the Primrose management team, of trying to build strong enduring relationships from the outset of the CoSA with these third party agencies. These relationships were fostered by the co-ordinator by constant communication throughout the circle. However, Jackie suggested that this was not a simple task as frequently such organisations were fragmented:

“I mean people don’t seem to be working together, they sort of refer from one agency to another, it’s all about signposting and not actually doing work.” (Jackie)

Jackie argued that this reluctance to take responsibility often meant that passing the core members support needs over after the completion of the circle was sometimes an onerous and disheartening task.

Three of the four Primrose CoSAs set their endings around transitional events. In Circle 1 it was moving to different, assisted adult accommodation, for Circle 2 it was the core member embarking on a professional course and in Circle 4 it was the change of educational establishment. This meant that the conclusion of the circle appeared to be a natural progression and not the result of the core member’s behaviour. All of the circles had a ‘celebration’, a ‘ceremony’ (as

suggested in many restorative practices) to end their circle (Braithwaite and Mungford, 1994). They used the opportunity to reaffirm their continuing belief in their core member and highlight all that they had achieved as mentioned by this Circle 2 volunteer, in their final focus group:

“We tried to consciously make it a celebration of the group’s achievements so that he did not feel like we were ending the circle because we did not want to spend time with him anymore.” C2Vol4

The ending of a circle inspired mixed feelings in both the Primrose volunteers and core members. Most of the volunteers stated that they felt that they benefited from and enjoyed the programme, and five of the 20 volunteers have subsequently enrolled to be a volunteer for another circle. However, for many of the volunteers ending the circle was followed by a sense of relief. This may have been due to the length of the commitment, promising to give up an evening a week for the lifetime of an extended circle was considered by many to be relatively onerous. However, I would also argue that working on such a programme, one which appears to be supporting a socially stigmatized group, was an emotionally draining task. To remain positive, yet realistic may have been difficult when striving for a goal such as reintegration or ‘no more victims’. This may be especially problematic as the realities and opportunities for reintegration into a socially equitable community were relatively remote no matter how much support and social capital the volunteers were able to provide (Clarke *et al.*, 2015). This will have become more and more evident as the volunteers became involved in their core members’ worlds.

At the commencement of the model, many of volunteers had ideas about reintegration and why it should be an objective of a criminal justice programme as shown by this statement from a volunteer in Circle 1 in their first focus groups:

“I think any project which seeks to reintegrate marginalised or wrongful members of society back into society is a good thing, cause I think society as a whole we need to take more responsibility, for the vulnerable groups and if we don't take more responsibility they will become more and more vulnerable.” C1Vol2

Most of the Primrose circles had problems applying the concept of reintegration to their core member as their core members had never been formally excluded from society (i.e. never gone to prison). However, in Circle 3 the volunteers believed Alex was working towards some kind of reintegration. Furthermore, this was not merely being physically present within society, but also contributing in a positive way to society. They believed he had engaged to such a degree that he saw himself as someone who had something to contribute, as mentioned here by a Circle 3 volunteer in their second focus group:

“I think it is more than a likelihood he’s already reintegrating himself into society ... he’s doing a lot towards reintegration and also giving back to the community through volunteering.” C3Vol4

Charlie also mentioned at the end of his circle that he too would like to volunteer. He said that he wanted someday to work with a CoSA as a volunteer. He felt that he would be able to help because he had experienced problems at school and had been called names, so he knew what it felt like (Circle 4 case file). However, for Charlie reintegration/integration was a struggle and despite showing improvements within the circle, he was being even further separated from conventional pathways and communities. His circle finished because he was being sent to a specialist school. This is a comment from one of his volunteers in their final focus group:

“It was unfortunate that actually he got kind of further segregated [from] mainstream society by being in isolation at school. It is a shame that maybe he could not have stayed in [a] mainstream school and developed strategies for engaging at that level which would have included him more within mainstream society.”C4Vol1

Other Primrose volunteers voiced concerns about how their core members would cope when their circle ended. They still worried about his isolation as shown by this comment from a volunteer in Circle 2 in their second focus group:

“It is more about the future when he will not have a circle which concerns me a bit, what if he is lonely?” C2Vol2

Some volunteers found that they had to develop a philosophical attitude about their core member's continued isolation, as was shown by this Circle 1 volunteer when reflecting in their final focus group stated:

"The truth is he has done fantastic, ... he has not got in trouble, and he is leading a very, I imagine he has quite a sort of solitary existence ...he is socially quite isolated but actually he's developed a sort of resilience or sort ability to sort of manage" C1Vol1

I observed something similar to this philosophical approach in a meeting with Circle 4 volunteers. In this meeting they were discussing how they could end their circle in a constructive manner. They had been advised that Charlie was being moved to residential school due to his behaviour at school. The volunteers all had reservations about the move feeling that it would have a detrimental effect on the relationship between him and his mother. However, rather than overtly voicing their concerns they tried to find the positives in such a move. They appeared to find it difficult to remove themselves emotionally, but recognised they needed to support Charlie in this transition. This resulted in a meeting which focused on the practicalities (for example who would be able to make certain meetings and what they needed to talk about). This meant they avoided any discussion of the emotional repercussions of such a move.

Most Primrose volunteers at the end of their circles appeared able to relinquish their supportive responsibilities, some readily and others reluctantly. Unlike the Canadian CoSAs, the UK CoSA programme does not encourage volunteers to open up their own personal social life to the core members (Fox, 2016). It therefore does not foster the same potential for social capital building. At the time of writing only one of the 20 Primrose volunteers remains in contact with the core member. The others have either not been in touch with the core member or have tried and the core member has not responded. Therefore most of the Primrose core members are potentially in the same social position they were before they started the circle. They may have greater confidence and socialisation skills, but will find themselves with access to diminishing social budgets (Kirkwood and McNeill, 2015). It should also be noted that the skills the Primrose core members were able to cultivate within their circles could be transitory as they were something developed and fostered with the support of the Primrose Project. Those with learning disabilities, particularly those with

autism, need regular reminders and reinforcement to retain such developments (SOTSC-ID, 2010). With continuing limited opportunities to enhance their social capital and the remote likelihood of obtaining employment (another important route into accessing greater social capital and promoting desistance (Farrall, 2004)) the core members are returning to the same isolated position. If, as Kirkwood and McNeill (2015) indicate, integration needs to be supported by access to opportunities then an 18 month circle is probably not sufficient. Furthermore, it could be argued that it is unfair and manipulative to ask a group of volunteers to take on the burden supporting such integration. But as Carlen (2012) suggests, most of those that are supposedly reintegrated or rehabilitated are usually returned to the same “economically and/or socially disadvantaged” position and that this is now potentially more injurious due to cuts in state benefits and support interventions.

Conclusion

When asked whether their circle was one of support or accountability, most of the Primrose volunteers highlighted that support was the predominant concept in their circle. Support that was not hiding or obscured by accountability as suggested in the Thomas *et al.*, (2014: 28) study. The Primrose Project appeared to be able to prioritise the core member’s support needs and as part of their supporting role endeavoured to enhance the core member’s socialisation skills and tackle his problems of isolation. However, their ultimate goal of community reintegration appeared to be unachievable given his complex needs and background and a diminishing social care budget.

Reintegration/rehabilitation is a reciprocal arrangement requiring the lasting provision of opportunities “to increase the quality, quantity and range of social connections” (Kirkwood and McNeill, 2015: 520). However, these are not concerns of a UK CoSA model fixed within the criminal justice system (McCartan *et al.*, 2014; McCartan, 2016). The priority of these CoSAs remains ‘no more victims’, without the acknowledgement that the core member could also be a victim.

To further the supportive arm of the model, adaptations had to be accommodated in the Primrose CoSA. These included the fact that progress

with all aspects of the model were via gradual increments due to the cognitive abilities of the core members. This had to be managed carefully by the Primrose Project to ensure engagement and the development of the important relationship of trust. Furthermore, greater consideration of the complexities of the core member's lives was required which meant the inclusion of families and negotiated external professional co-operation. This ultimately required adaptation in expectations, volunteer training and support, assessments and evaluation processes as the core members did not fit into any convenient tick boxes. Going forward such adaptations may be problematic if connected to funding or criminal justice measures such as recidivism. Two of the four core member's (Joe and Charlie) were involved in potential sexually harmful behaviour whilst in their circles (these incidents are discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 on accountability and risk). Yet the volunteers involved in those circles would have said the circles had a positive influence on the core members. Distancing these types of CoSAs from the criminal justice system and setting them within a social care environment may not only mitigate success criteria, but would also provide a more start to end programme. Referring organisations (social services) would then be invested in all the stages of the CoSA programme and potentially have the budget to cover the management of such programmes. However, transferring these CoSAs to social or welfare agencies does raise concerns. As highlighted by Rodger (2008) and Pitts (2015), this potentially includes these agencies in a criminal justice arena linking them to criminal rather than social care objectives.

The next chapter will continue with an exploration of the role of accountability within the Primrose CoSAs. It will highlight that unlike support, it is a difficult concept to understand and utilise, which is further complicated when considering CoSAs for young people with learning disabilities. The chapter includes discussions of the tensions between support and accountability. It examines the role accountability plays within the particular Primrose circles and its effect on the core members.

Chapter 6

Accountability: Taking Responsibility or Creating Confrontation

Introduction

This chapter examines the role of accountability within Primrose CoSAs, with particular reference to its interaction with the previously discussed concept of support. Consideration will also be given to the implications of working with accountability in a risk focused society which will lead into Chapter 7 on risk. This chapter will commence with a discussion of the definition of accountability and how considerations of risk and managing 'risky' individuals was understood within the Primrose circles, particularly by the volunteers. It is argued that due to the importance given to accountability and its monitoring properties, it continues to be a prominent part of the programme despite the tensions it causes with the CoSAs interpersonal objectives. Notwithstanding this statement, there was evidence that the Primrose Project was able to relax some of the harsher elements of accountability in order to support their core members. This revised administration was largely due to both the ages and cognitive abilities of the core members.

Following on from this, there is a discussion of how both age and disability affected accountability in the Primrose Project. This was particularly evident when the commonly used treatment concepts of disclosure and empathy were used to facilitate accountability (Brown, 2005). The relationships at the heart of the Primrose circles will be examined to explore how they can foster a degree of accountability and how this can be viewed through the restorative justice theory of reintegrative shaming (Braithwaite, 1989). This chapter also considers whether accountability, with its reliance on communication skills and cognitive reflection, is something that needs to be modified or discarded in order to ensure that the Primrose core members are able to engage with their circle and its benefits. Ultimately, it seems that it is the influence of support that holds the model together and that accountability, if not able to contribute to risk management successfully, becomes purely punitive.

What is Accountability?

Accountability, as noted in Chapter 2, has a wide definition. For the purpose of UK CoSAs, it is described on the Circles UK's website as the core member taking on responsibility (be 'accountable') for his/her ongoing risk management (Circles UK, 2015b). This is undertaken with the assistance of the circle volunteers who will be aware of the core member's previous sexually harmful behaviour and his/her potential reoffending 'triggers' (Circles UK, 2016). Core members are expected to take responsibility for their actions, both historic and on-going, which is reinforced through "the scrutiny of [the] circle" Hannem (2013: 275). This was true for Primrose CoSAs despite the fact that only one of the four Primrose core members had been prosecuted for sexually harmful behaviour.

The Primrose volunteers mentioned their accountability driven scrutiny and management obligations throughout this study. They felt that part of their role as a Primrose CoSA volunteer was to keep their core member on the; "*straight and narrow*" (C1Vol1, C1Vol3, C3Vol3, and C4Vol3). This phrase was used at several points in the lifecycle of many of the Primrose CoSAs, appearing in the first, second and final focus groups. This was a factor that remained constant throughout the CoSA process despite the volunteer's greater understanding of the core member's needs and capabilities.

However, accountability did not factor heavily in every circle, Circle 2's volunteers were probably the least engaged with accountability. Even from the first focus group, they were thinking in terms of support and relationships. When asked about accountability, their initial concern, which was common to all the Primrose CoSAs, was how it would be managed:

"I think that the accountability bit, I really struggle with how that is going to work in practice." C2Vol3

This point was countered by another volunteer in the same circle who, having reflected on the issue, suggested that accountability could be managed within their supportive role enabling them to work with both concepts:

"I think they are inter-related because you support somebody by holding them accountable and accountability helps to support somebody ... I

hope it is much more holistic, fluid process. I think that's all it can be without being artificial, without us you know trying to be something we are not." C2Vol4

However, this perception was not widespread. The majority of the Primrose volunteers started the circle process with a limited understanding of accountability and how it would be used by them to fulfil their role within the CoSA. Nevertheless, what they did seem to share was the belief that accountability had a confrontational element, needing them to forcefully challenge and question the core member. The potential confrontational nature of accountability was a concern for many of the circles as is illustrated by the following extracts from two volunteers in Circles 3 and 4 in their initial focus groups:

"it feels confrontational to challenge somebody's behaviours... there may be obligations to report behaviour that is inappropriate and I think that will feel like ... letting him down and I think challenging him about his actual behaviour if you just absolutely know that they are lying. I mean that is not going to work either. So I think that there will be potential for lots, quite a lot of conflict and nobody likes conflict." C3Vol3

"making somebody accountable for their actions for me that is like kind of pointing the finger telling them off and that is not something that I am used to doing at all." C4Vol1

Such impressions were probably linked to several factors, for example, a general understanding of the model and a perception of how to work with 'sex offenders'. A further influencing factor may have been the CoSA process itself.

Core Member Initial Disclosure: The First Step in Accountability

Both traditional and Primrose CoSAs start with a meeting in which all present are informed about and discuss the core member's previous sexually harmful behaviour, 'disclosure'. In traditional CoSAs, the core member is usually present at this meeting and he/she will disclose his/her previous sexually harmful behaviour to the volunteers. He/she will have usually been through some form of Sex Offender Treatment Programme in prison in which a fundamental part is

disclosure and the acknowledgement of harm (Brown, 2005). As detailed in Chapter 4 on the research design and methodology, the Primrose management team chose to apply a degree of discretion to how they managed the initial core member disclosure. They adapted their CoSA programme by only having a disclosure meeting with the core member present if he was judged (by the Primrose management team) to be capable of managing the emotional effects of such a meeting. If it was decided that the core member should not be present, the Primrose co-ordinator would make a statement about the core member in the 'social meeting'. This was a much more rounded report which not only included his risks and triggers, but also other important factors in his life. In the Primrose Project Alex was the only core member to disclose his previous sexually harmful behaviour to the volunteers at their first meeting. In all the other Primrose CoSAs the core members' disclosure was made at the 'social meeting' without the core member being present.

One of the Primrose volunteers attended both types of meeting. He was a volunteer in Circle 2, where disclosure was presented by a member of the Primrose management team at the 'social meeting'. He was then seconded into Circle 3 where the core member personally disclosed his previous sexually harmful behaviour at the 'disclosure meeting'. This volunteer (C2Vol1/C3Vol5) was therefore able to compare the two types of meeting. When asked about his thoughts on this process, he highlighted that he thought everyone benefited from the core member being present. He felt that it meant everyone knew what had been said and that this meant that the sexually harmful behaviour could be more easily discussed with the core member. However, he did state, as shown in the extract below, that this changed the nature of the first meeting with the core member (although he did acknowledge that the meeting was likely to have been different as all the participants were different):

"I think it is important that he knows that we know and that we know it all and it is kind of like the elephant in the room is gone and that is a really important thing ... then everyone is like straight away into the heavy talk, like in the first meeting." C2Vol1/C3Vol5

Whilst the above volunteer felt that the first meeting with Alex went well, albeit a bit 'heavy', this was not true for all the volunteers present at that meeting. One of the other volunteers (C3Vol2) felt that their inability to ask Alex questions at

this meeting meant they struggled with clarity. She felt that this meant they may not understand all of Alex's risks in respect of his sexually harmful behaviour. It should be noted that she worked within the criminal justice system and potentially derived a degree of comfort from safety plans etc.:

"I would have liked to have seen that handled differently so that we did have that opportunity to be a lot clearer about what had actually happened and what he had then learnt from treatments so that we would be clear about what his safety plans were." C3Vol2

I would argue that if the central focus for the first meeting is accountability and risk management it can set the tone for future meetings, circle relationships and the CoSA programme generally. It also puts the core member in a defensive position at the outset of the process, thus creating tension before any early relationship building endeavours.

When interviewed, the volunteer who had been to both types of disclosure meeting (C2Vol1/C3Vol5) mentioned he felt that Tad's non-participation in a 'disclosure meeting' left the volunteers feeling confused. He felt they were uncertain whether they should, or how to, raise the issue of his previous harmful behaviour. The volunteers in Circle 2 did appear to be very reticent to scrutinise or dwell on Tad's previous sexually harmful behaviour. However, this could have been for reasons other than Tad not being present for disclosure. It may have been because they had spent a long time at the beginning of the process developing a supportive relationship and they did not want to jeopardise this. It could have equally been true that they did not feel either equipped or comfortable discussing this subject so avoided it. However, this was not the reason ventured by the volunteers for remaining silent on the issue, as highlighted by this extract from their second focus group:

"My sense with him is that he was quite ashamed of what he had done and it wasn't necessary to get him to confront the things he had done because was already fully aware of them." C2Vol3

In the same meeting, another volunteer also added that they were; *"not here to judge him for what he has done in the past and he wasn't showing any particularly risky signs that we needed to deal with."* (C2Vol4)

Therefore, implying that if his behaviour had led them to believe he was an ongoing risk, they would have discussed his previous sexually harmful behaviour. They appeared not to see accountability as a mandatory requirement, but one that was discretionary, only to be used if and when needed. This is potentially very different from the traditional CoSAs.

As mentioned earlier, Circle 3 was the only circle to have initial disclosure by the core member. In the meeting Alex was aided by his therapist who helped with and prompted his disclosure. This concerned the volunteers. They wanted to hear Alex acknowledge his guilt and reassure them of his intention not to reoffend without being encouraged by his therapist. Nevertheless, the volunteers chose not to revisit this subject at the next meeting. This decision is highlighted and justified in this extract from their second focus group:

“I have thought about it quite a lot, I think it was well intentioned, but it was sort of protecting him from having to do something that is obviously very key to what this process is about ie support and accountability and it is difficult to assess accountability if you haven’t really heard the core member in his own words explain something that he finds shocking. We have thought about it again since as a group saying should we now go back and raise it with him again and get him to talk about it in his own words, but I think this feels a bit negative.” C3Vol3

This volunteer appeared to believe that there was a tension between giving a further ‘full and frank’ disclosure and a positive environment. They therefore chose as a group to forego the repetition of disclosure. This was regardless of the fact that this may have been important from a social, moral and process perspective to the Primrose volunteers. They may have wanted to see some display of repentance, remorse and/or accountability (Levenson, 2011). It also implies that even if the core member did disclose his previous sexually harmful behaviour at the first meeting, revisiting the topic is something which had to be carefully considered and managed. Therefore, if the benefit of future discussions of the sexually harmful behaviour is not enhanced by personal disclosure by the core member, then its part in the CoSA process should be carefully evaluated. Such personal disclosure should be weighed against the likelihood of causing debilitating shame (disintegrative) which can negatively affect any developing relationships (Braithwaite, 1989).

Disclosure can be seen in many treatment programmes. Such programmes work with the premise that admission of guilt is an acknowledgement of wrongdoing and motivates the offender to desist from reoffending (Brown, 2005; Craissati, 2015). It is also a theme that is evident in many restorative justice models (Zehr, 2002). However, there has been recent debate as to the value of accountability, disclosure and the repudiation of the harmful behaviour. It has been argued that rather than promoting desistance and re-establishing the individual in the community such devices merely support the constructed social requirement for repudiation (Hannem and Petrunik, 2007; Craissati, 2015). I would argue that those who managed and worked on the Primrose CoSAs inherently understood that disclosure was unlikely to be an enlightening and/or redeeming experience. Arguably recognising that it was more about managing the individual than promoting self-understanding. Moreover, such a process would potentially be a negative and stigmatizing experience for the person disclosing (Ware and Mann, 2012). This may be particularly true for someone with a learning disability who may act on impulse and has no real understanding of what motivated him/her. Consequently getting the core member to 'satisfactorily' disclose, acknowledge guilt and contrition, in front of a group of strangers is likely to be unproductive and possibly damaging. This can be seen by the defence strategies adopted by the core members. Charlie rather than discussing his behaviour withdrew from the meeting by; "*hiding in his coat*" (C4Vol1) and Joe did not turn up to meetings he knew would involve discussions of his sexual behaviour (Circle 1 case file). These strategies did not promote communication or trust but created tension between the core members and the volunteers.

Next Steps - Evolving Accountability within the Primrose CoSAs

After the 'disclosure meeting', there were weekly meetings in which the volunteers' would ask the core member to account for his behaviours (McCartan, et al., 2014). In the Primrose Project, there was only two real instances of accountability concerning sexually harmful behaviour. These were in Circles 1 and 4 and will be discussed later in this chapter. On-going accountability in the Primrose Project extended further than potential sexually harmful behaviour or ensuring the core member adhered to licence restrictions

and obligations. It covered issues which could have been considered inappropriate, possibly harmful, or anything that could (in the opinion of the volunteers) lead to an offence. I would argue that the execution of this accountability responsibility was heavily affected by the volunteers' personal risk evaluation process. This in turn was influenced by the volunteers' professional and social constructions and will be discussed further in Chapter 7 on risk.

Such calling to account was evident in the Primrose CoSAs and is illustrated by the following two situations. In Circle 1, the volunteers were concerned by not only Joe's interest in girls younger than sixteen years of age, but also his attitude towards women and girls generally. They felt that he had negative and misogynistic views. They believed that this could be partially explained by his involvement in male gangs, which provided him with a social framework and informed his views on women. Without the gangs, he would have been friendless and very isolated. He also lived in a residential hostel which solely catered for boys and young men. When talking about his need to appear "*the butch macho man*" (C1Vol4), the volunteers stated that they would challenge this attitude, despite their recognition that this was probably an act he had adopted to fit in. This challenging attitude is shown in this extract from their second focus group:

"It is important that we do kind of pick him up when he says; "oh I will go and give her a slap" [and we reply] "you really don't do that". We are trying to instil this idea that actually women ... [are] deserving of respect and you don't go round beating people up because they disagree with you, which I don't think he does as much as he likes to give us the impression that he does." C1Vol3

Another example of calling to account was in Circle 4, in the midst of a discussion on friends and relationships. Charlie related specific views that the volunteers (as shown in this extract from their second focus group) felt they needed to question him on:

"He was quite strong on the fact that he thought that any sort of gay relationships were completely wrong, which we tried to challenge him on, but it was quite interesting to see how he had a very sort of set view.

[They] might be sort of peer beliefs at that age, people get bullied unfortunately still, I think for being gay.” C4Vol1

Although both challenges could be seen as justified, neither lines of questioning were in respect of any particular risks or actions that were going to lead to specific harmful behaviour. Yet the core members were called upon to detail their actions and thoughts. They were asked to either justify or acknowledge fault which would have been difficult as their abilities to reflect and analyse were potentially limited due to their age (for Charlie), cognitive and linguistic abilities. These challenges were felt appropriate despite recognition by both sets of volunteers that the attitudes may have been a result of the core member's own particular social constructions. Charlie had been bullied at school for 'being gay', therefore voicing opinions which were sympathetic towards homosexuality was likely to have had a negative implications for him (Circle 4 case file), ones he would seek to avoid and distance himself from.

As shown, accountability can be extended to not only actual sexually harmful behaviour, but may include behaviours or lines of thought that could be considered 'risky' and possibly associated with reoffending (McNaughton Nicholls and Webster, 2014; Ministry of Justice, 2013b). For Circles 1 and 3, those with the oldest core members, this included alcohol consumption, drug misuse and peer influence which is further discussed in Chapter 7 on risk. However, it was not only offence inducing or related topics that were discussed in order to promote accountability. Frequently, Primrose core members were reminded that certain behaviour was inappropriate and had potential consequences. The volunteers challenged the core member because, having recognised the risk to others was low, their concern was the potential negative consequences for the core member. An example of this was in Circle 3 when the volunteers were asked about the roles of support and accountability (in their final focus group). One of the volunteers reflected on a discussion with Alex when he had told them about riding his bike in the park, which was against park rules:

“I think he gained a sense of understanding that there were certain things that he could not do that others could get away with. So the thing like the illegal thing on the bike. Yes his cousin was doing it but because of his background potentially the police were going to look at him a lot quicker

than somebody else. I think he got an understanding of that and I don't think that was necessarily a bad thing. He was clear about the fact that there wasn't going to be leeway for him and that's reality." C3Vol2

As can be seen from the above, there is the potential for a volunteer to question any behaviour, comments and/or statement of the core members and this could be because they see their job as *"keeping them on the straight and narrow"*.

However, this does raise questions about whether this intervention is proportionate (Glaser, 2003: 151). Especially as the majority of the Primrose CoSAs (three of the four) included core members who had never been convicted of an offence relating to sexually harmful behaviour.

However, placing accountability (with support) at the forefront of the model gives it considerable weight, giving the impression that accountability should be exercised diligently and forcefully, particularly within a society that has numerous negative constructions around anyone involved with sexually harmful behaviour. Such constructions imply that unless challenged strongly, something may be missed due to the individuals propensity to be deceitful and manipulative (Matravers, 2003). Yet confrontational approaches have been shown to be detrimental when working with offenders, especially those who have exhibited sexually harmful behaviour (Ware and Mann, 2012).

Instinctively, many of the Primrose volunteers chose not to use their ability to ask questions in a confrontational or accusatorial manner. A particularly good example of this was how the volunteers in Circle 4 approached Charlie after he had been isolated at school. He had inappropriately touched himself and a fellow pupil. This instance was approached sensitively, rather than confrontationally. The volunteers felt it was important that Charlie did not feel judged or stigmatized. They felt that they needed to allow him time and space in which to recover from the incident and its repercussions before pursuing any form of accountability. The following extracts (from their second focus group and a volunteer interview at the end of the CoSA) detail the response of two volunteers:

"He was just hiding in his coat for the whole session. He just sat the corner. He was just so uncomfortable. We sort of changed topic half way

through, I mean I found it too intense just to watch him squirming.”

C4Vol1

“I think that the most important thing in that case is like we tried [to make him] not feel judged by us. I think it is really important to just feel, okay I am here they are just talking to me, they are not thinking I am disgusting”

C4Vol4

It would appear that the volunteers in Circle 4, like those in Circle 3 (as mentioned in the discussion on disclosure), felt that avoiding or delaying discussing possible accountability issues meant they could better manage their core member's feelings of stigma and alienation. This could have been due to the core member's age and/or intellectual abilities, or the volunteers' personalities or professional backgrounds. It could have also been due to the fact that the Primrose CoSAs were being overseen by a therapy oriented group instead of the traditional criminal justice influenced management team. This meant that risk management, although present, was not an overriding consideration. This suggests that those involved in the Primrose Project appeared to accept that repeated ongoing accountability, particularly if promoted by a form of confrontation was of limited value. They were able to acknowledge that their core members were more likely to respond to displays of caring and interest and equally likely to feel disheartened, stigmatised and shamed if constantly faced with managerial driven accountability requirements (Faulkner and Burnett, 2012).

Developing Relationships and Accountability

Many of the Primrose volunteers stated that working with accountability was only possible within an established relationship and that such a relationship was facilitated through the provision of support. This point was made by all of the Primrose CoSAs, but was particularly poignant for Circle 2. The volunteers spent a considerable amount of time developing a supportive and trusting relationship, as highlighted in this extract (from their second focus group):

“I think we found it easier as a circle to do the supporting bit, and the accountability bit was a bit more of an effort, I think we recognised that it

was a really important thing to do once we had built a foundation and felt that he trusted us.” C2Vol4

Some of the other Primrose volunteers initially found it difficult to develop strong trusting relationships with their core members, particularly when balancing the responsibilities of accountability. It could be argued that to be able to work with the questioning (managerial) elements of accountability the volunteers would have to remain distant and critically objective which would inhibit the interpersonal requirements of a supportive relationship (Faulkner and Burnett, 2012; Hucklesby and Wincup, 2014).

I would argue that this claim is borne out in Circle 1. The challenging accountability role of the CoSA was established for Circle 1 in their first circle meeting when Joe put some pens into his pocket. The volunteers (as highlighted here in their second focus group) felt they needed to respond in a particular way:

“We were also very aware that we are here in a [monitoring] role yeah, keeping you on the straight and narrow. We can’t just watch you pocket a load of board markers and then [say], “that is fine, see you next week.” So we kind of called him on that ... so that element started quite quickly. We were there as a kind of authority relationship. I don’t know whether authority is the right word but we are figures of authority.” C1Vol3

“We were prepared to tackle him, yeah not let him get away with things.” C1Vol1

The particular concern for this circle, as highlighted to the volunteers by the co-ordinator at the outset of the circle, was that Joe engaged in relationships, possibly sexual, with girls under the age of 16 years. Therefore in exercising their accountability role, the volunteers spent considerable time questioning Joe about his ongoing relationships. This was often done in what would appear to be an accusatorial manner, as mentioned in reflection (in the second focus group) by one of the volunteers:

“When we started we were quite, er, have you been doing this, have you been doing that, oh was she over 16, so it was quite I don’t want to say

confrontational, but quite picky, ... you can almost understand how he would think; "oh calm down"." C1Vol3

I observed this circle's relationship in their initial review meeting at Joe's hostel, which was approximately six months into the circle (my personal reflections are detailed in Chapter 4). Joe had just had a meeting with his social workers and then went straight in to the circle review meeting. Present at this meeting were his social workers (2), key worker, Primrose volunteers and co-ordinator and myself. The social workers told the meeting that Joe's ex-girlfriend was pregnant. Joe had been expelled from college for non-attendance and, due to this, his benefits would be suspended. Furthermore, he had just been advised that he was going to be prosecuted for a theft related offence. The meeting was a very difficult meeting in which Joe responded defensively or ignored most comments. He said he did not believe he was the father of the child (this was challenged by one of the volunteers). He said he did not like attending a college for those with learning disabilities and stated he was not guilty of the offence. Joe fidgeted throughout the meeting and did not make eye contact with anyone present, preferring to look at his mobile phone. He also spent a lot of time rebuffing the volunteers' questions either verbally or by shrugging. Sometimes the volunteers would openly challenge Joe, saying they knew he told lies and other times they would struggle to respond. It was a very uncomfortable meeting and one that did not reflect an established supportive relationship.

However, by the final focus group this circle had become a lot more contemplative about how they managed accountability:

"I think one of the interesting things was that we had to actually learn how you deal with accountability" C1Vol1

The volunteers felt that their circle changed from one that was initially driven by accountability to one that primarily offered support and if they did venture into accountability they tackled it in a different way:

"We did make sure that he at least reflected on some of the consequences of his actions." C1Vol2

"I think finding us relaxing with him and him relaxing with us has kind of changed our perspective on how we worked with him." C1Vol3

By about midway through Circle 1, the volunteers had started to approach accountability in a way that seemed less confrontational. They did not tackle difficult topics en masse, but allowed one volunteer to make a point. This was only ever backed up by other volunteers if Joe failed to understand. This was then taken up by another volunteer who would try and engage Joe in a different manner. They felt that the different delivery of the same information benefited him. So rather than being confrontational or “*ambivalent*” (C1Vol3), they believed they instinctively took on particular roles. These replicated a family, a mother, father and two siblings. This is illustrated in this extract of their second focus group:

“So basically we have started a really weird sort of. C1Vol3

Family. C1Vol2

Familial yeah. C1Vol3

With all the different personalities and the way we each take on the roles, it works really well, if C1Vol1 or C1Vol4 was telling Joe off we’d reinforce that by saying; “come on you have got to, you can’t be doing this it is not right”, and you kind of deliver that same information in a different way. And I think he definitely benefits from that.” C1Vol2

They then appeared to take on what could be considered traditional characteristics of those roles as highlighted by the ‘mother’ of the group:

“I think [I am] more protective towards him when you are stern with him, but I think it is really good that he sees that. He feels both of those different styles, to hear different people express things in different ways.” C1Vol1

The volunteers in Circle 1 acknowledged that only when they became more supportive did Joe begin to connect with them. This change in volunteer behaviour could have been as a result of the perceived lack of core member engagement, produced by an overly authoritarian administration of accountability. However, it could also be argued that they were answering his basic human needs and he in turn responded to this (Hannem and Petrunik, 2007; Hammen, 2013).

It should also be mentioned that, from the very commencement of the circle, the volunteers in Circle 1 had to navigate many issues, such as, Joe frequently missing meetings, him being “high” at meetings, numerous financial and occupational problems, housing issues, paternity and a criminal prosecution. For them the big turning point in their circle was not making Joe responsible for his sexually harmful behaviour (consensual sex with a girl under 16), but the support offered and accepted in the criminal prosecution.

For this circle, accountability in its initial challenging and punitive adaptation resulted in distance and friction. This could have been not only because of the way accountability was administered, but also the core member’s previous negative experience with male authority figures as discussed in Chapter 5 on support. The gender composition of the volunteers for Circle 1 was predominantly male. It had been noted in in two Primrose circles that men and women execute accountability differently. The volunteers in Circles 2 and 3 felt that women were more willing to ask difficult questions, but that they posed them in a more sympathetic manner. This is a comment from a male volunteer in Circle 3 when discussing how the women in his group managed probing questions:

“ [If it] is going to be a slightly more serious conversation ... to try and gauge what his life is really like and what his stresses are and where we can help him more. I think actually the women in the group are far better than we are.” C3Vol3

It was the supportive non-confrontational relationship that enabled the volunteers to productively judge when accountability was appropriate and exactly how it was best utilised. The supportive relationship had a better chance of managing the punitive, stigmatising and shaming elements of accountability. Many Primrose volunteers suggested that the core member would only freely discuss and disclose difficult behaviours once he felt “safe” (a word frequently used by the volunteers to describe their circles). Fox (2016) in her research also confirmed that accountability was best used after time and with trust. Both CoSAs and re-integrative shaming recognise the importance of holding the core member accountable, but that this is best enabled by a strong and caring relationship or “ring of relationships” (Braithwaite 1989; Hopgood, 2012: 11; McAlinden, 2005; Wilson, 2011). This interdependence, between accountability

and relationships, was suggested in all the Primrose CoSAs, particularly in reference to trust. This is illustrated by these two extracts from Circles 1 and 3 volunteers in their second focus groups:

“We moved from accountability to support more, more because we understand each other, we trust each other more.” C1Vol4

“I think he is just looking for, not to try and get around us, but just get a perception of himself from people that he now trusts because I expect he has had a lot of people in his life that he hasn’t trusted or he’s been suspicious of or they have tried to take advantage of him” C3Vol3

Non-Judgmental Non-Professional Relationships

Many of the volunteers recognised that it was not only the relationship which was important, but also the nature of the relationship. Whilst the topic of non-professional relationships has been discussed in Chapter 5 on support, it is important to consider how this type of relationship affects the concept of accountability. The Primrose volunteers felt that their volunteer status within the circle was important and that they had a personal and not a professional interest in the core member. This made it a more social relationship. The distinction between the volunteers and professionals was viewed as important because the Primrose volunteers believed that the core members often had a difficult and negative relationship with many of the professionals in their lives. They felt that those relationships were often ones in which the core member felt adversely judged. It was this possible link between accountability, which can arguably be shaming and stigmatizing, and how the core members view professionals that is pertinent to this chapter. In particular the perception of the professional as negative and judgmental. Therefore accountability exercised by someone seen as professional could be viewed adversely, often inducing protection strategies from individuals such as denial and avoidance. This type of professional relationship was highlighted by a volunteer in Circle 1 in their final focus group:

“Some of the people who I work with, with learning disabilities, they have lots of professionals around them, but they don’t really have a circle, which is a little bit more informal, of people who they can relate to, who they can talk to about issues without maybe being judged.” C1Vol2

This statement is particularly thought provoking as it was made by someone who was a professional working with people who had learning disabilities.

The non-professional relationship appeared to have particular resonance with the Primrose CoSAs because of the core member's lifelong involvement with professionals. This was due to not only their learning disabilities, but their familial, social and financial problems. Many of the volunteers felt that these professional interactions had not always benefitted the core members. Such dealings frequently appeared judgmental and overbearing, often producing relationships concerned with management rather than assistance. This was highlighted by Circle 4 when they talked about a professional in the lives of Charlie and his mother (who, like other care givers involved in the Primrose circles, had a learning disability):

"[The professional was] speaking over us, just giving us a monologue about what she did and it kind of it gave the insight into how suffocated [Charlie and his mother] must feel." C4Vol1

Several Primrose circles had this sense of 'professional intervention overload' and that their CoSA relationship was something different. This was despite many of the volunteers being either professionals within the criminal justice system or the field of learning disability. This finding of professional distrust has been shown in other studies (Phoenix and Kelly, 2013; Porteous, *et al.*, 2015). This is even more damaging for with those who have learning disabilities who often feel that professionals look down on them (Wilson and Prescott 2014: 140). Fox (2010, 2015) highlighted, after investigating three Vermont reintegration programmes, that it was possible to manage accountability, but this had to be contained within a non-professional social relationship model.

Therefore I would argue that for accountability to be a productive tool in a CoSA, its confrontational and challenging standpoint needs to be adapted. It has to be sensitively used within an established supportive relationship within a non-judgmental and trusting framework which facilitates the free and unfettered flow of communication.

Working with Accountability and the Different Primrose Core Members

Accountability enabled the volunteers to monitor, through their weekly interaction, the core member's behaviour and question any behaviour they thought problematic. Therefore an obvious pre-requisite for accountability is the ability and confidence of all parties to be able to communicate with a degree of mutual understanding. From a public safety perspective, this would be the core member advising the circle of any issues connected to his licence requirements and whether he has been involved in any situations which would cause concern. This would require a certain degree of understanding on the part of the core member as to what behaviours may cause concern.

The Primrose volunteers voiced unease from the outset as to whether their core members understood the implications of certain behaviour, both for the core member and other potential victims. Some volunteers gradually began to suggest that their core members recognised that their previous sexually harmful behaviour was 'wrong' (Circle 2 and Circle 3), but two circles (Circle 1 and Circle 4) continually struggled with this concept. This is evidenced in these two extracts. The first is from an interview with a volunteer from Circle 1 at the end of the circle:

"He didn't acknowledge that he had done anything wrong um it transpired through the circle that he actually was very comfortable with what he was doing." C1Vol4

This second extract is from a volunteer in Circle 4's final focus group. The volunteer is responding to a question about whether a young person with learning disabilities can be schooled in accountability:

"I don't know. I think it is more difficult than maybe if someone was older and didn't have [learning disabilities]. Obviously it is important that they do learn accountability because it could stop their behaviour, but I think it is probably more challenging because it is actually really truly getting him to understand what [he] did was wrong. ... It is quite tough to bring up." C4Vol1

Therefore for these circles, understanding appeared illusive and accountability seemed to be an unobtainable and impractical objective.

Working with accountability was not the same for every circle. It depended not only on the strength of the relationship, but also the core member and his life experiences. As is discussed throughout my research, all of the core members had experienced trauma and had challenging social and familial backgrounds. This had inevitably led to strategies and methods of internalising situations which were not always compatible with the aims of the CoSA model. This was particularly true when considering painful and difficult concepts which would be raised with accountability. This was voiced by one of the volunteers in Circle 1 in an interview at the end of his circle:

“The core member didn’t really feel that he should be accountable to us at all. I don’t think he understood that as part of his role within the circle. He never thought he was accountable to anybody. ... His sense of accountability was not very developed, unfortunately, he has his own norms that are part of the way he leads his life, and they are the norms that make him survive in the environment he lives in.” C1Vol4

Therefore for Joe free and open communication, particularly about difficult issues, was something that did not come easily or naturally and to expect him to do so was unrealistic. Like many of the other core members, he had developed strategies to deal with difficulties he encountered and this did not include openly discussing and acknowledging problems. Ignoring issues or “*being the butch man*” was possibly his way of “*hiding in his coat*”.

Working with accountability in Circle 3 was again different. This was perhaps understandable as Alex had been involved with the criminal justice system and was on licence. Alex was better versed in the language of risk having had sex offender treatment and could openly discuss issues such as, proximity to children, alcohol and illegal substance usage. These declarations and openness to discussion caused the volunteers in his circle to relax, however, he did technically breach the terms of his licence. In a circle meeting, he told the volunteers about a new female friend he had made whilst playing video games online. The girl was 16 years old, although she had initially told Alex she was in her 20’s. This was a potential breach of his licence as he was not allowed unsupervised communication with a person under 18 years of age. Alex did not realise this, nor did he see this as a potential risk of further sexually harmful behaviour, he merely saw the interaction as making a new friend. He told the

circle about the girl as it was something that had happened in his week, not because he saw it as an accountability issue. It was not something that he planned or hid. As one of Circle 3's volunteers in their second focus group highlighted:

"I mean he will tell us things that he has done and I don't get a sense that he is hiding something about his life from us." C3Vol3

Accountability implies that risky behaviours are thought out, planned, reflected upon and hidden, however, this was not the case for the core members in my research. Trying to explain this incident in terms of accountability or potential risk was problematic, not merely because Alex was unable to understand things in numerical terms. Therefore it was explained in terms of going back to prison rather than the possibility of it leading to further offences. This oblique understanding as to why something is 'wrong' is mentioned below when discussing Charlie's incident at school. In this incident the volunteers had to factor in that Charlie probably did not understand the implications of what he had done. Furthermore, there was possibly no motive behind his actions or his reasons may not have been directly related to the behaviour. The use of challenging questioning in accountability implies that the core member has planned a course of action and that by forcefully interrogating him/her his intention to sexually harm will be exposed. As illustrated in Chapter 2 this is less likely to be the case for someone with a learning disability. He/she often acts on impulse without any prior planning or thought (Craig *et al.*, 2006) and his/her motive is not necessarily deviant (Griffiths *et al.*, 2013). This appeared to be the case for Charlie. This was highlighted when the volunteers discussed (in their second focus group) his response to questions about the incident at school:

"I think he almost thinks; "oh I just did it". I don't even know if he knows why he does it, I think maybe he does it on impulse because he doesn't really understand properly himself." C4Vol1

Therefore the confrontational inquisitorial nature of accountability seems to create tensions not only with the support function of the CoSA, but also creates an unrealistic picture of the Primrose core members.

However, as highlighted in the previous Chapter 5 on support, the Primrose Project re-evaluated the need for rigid accountability. It was suggested that

focused discussions on accountability often seemed counter-productive, inappropriate or unnecessary. This is illustrated by these comments from two volunteers in Circle 2 when asked at the end of their circle what type of circle it had been:

“Being the person he is, I think if we had done that [confront him] he would have totally closed off from us.” C2Vol3

“He wasn’t showing any particularly risky signs that we needed to deal with, so it was more about supporting him in order that he could be accountable himself for his actions and be safe for himself and for others” C2Vol4

Therefore accountability, if used in Primrose CoSAs, was adapted to be instructive rather than confrontational. Risks were highlighted and possible implications to the core member and others were discussed. Therefore even if the core member did not understand all the concepts being explored he would reflect upon the volunteer’s comments. In the Primrose CoSAs accountability was often used in an educative way, exploring situations. However, again this relies on there being a relationship between the volunteers and the core member to ensure he does not see such discussions as judgemental. These discussions were often about sex and sexual relationships. For some circles, particularly Circle 2, this appeared to be well received, but for others such as Circles 1 and 4 this was not the case. For Circle 1 the relationship and personalities appeared to prohibit a receptive discussion and in Circle 4 the volunteers were inhibited by what was appropriate to explore with a vulnerable young person under the age of 18. However, by trying to educate rather than punish, the Primrose CoSAs could arguably be endeavouring to promote a more public health centred model (Kemshall and McCartan, 2014; McCartan *et al.*, 2015).

This perception of a different type of accountability was highlighted by Helen in an interview early on in my study. She was explaining the difference between how the Primrose volunteers operated accountability:

“The circle is holding him accountable, but in a supportive way so he has got all these [other] people coming from a restrictive approach and the

circle is trying to have some empathy with him, but also to hold him accountable and that is exactly how it should work.” [Helen]

Empathy

Empathy was not only something the Primrose volunteers needed to use in response to their accountability role in the CoSAs, but was something they endeavoured to encourage in their core member when working with accountability. They thought that ultimately, like disclosure, empathy would enable the core member to better understand the impact of his actions. They also hoped that this empathy would help them explain complicated feelings and nurture comprehension. The Primrose volunteers attempted to prompt recognition from their core members that particular behaviour was harmful and upsetting. On achieving this understanding, they hoped that their core member would feel some degree of empathy and accountability. This was particularly pertinent for Circle 4. The volunteers spent a considerable amount of time trying to understand and discuss with Charlie the incident at school. They attempted to do this in a sensitive manner, but found that he remained uncommunicative and uncomprehending as highlighted here in their second focus group:

“When we say to him; “how do you think the other person would feel?” He would just say; “oh bad”. But like there [were no signs of remorse]. I am obviously not saying he should be weeping on the floor in tears and be like; “I am so terribly sorry”, but you do feel generally sorry that you have wronged somebody is some way. You [are] sort of quite keen to let people know that you feel bad about it, there doesn’t seem to be any of that.” C4Vol1

Due to this incident, Charlie was not only punished via isolation at school, but was also required to relocate to another school. The volunteers interestingly felt that this risk management outcome was an extreme move on the part of the school. This volunteer’s comment (in the second focus group) acknowledges that such measures are not always conducive to helping the core member understand the reasons behind his behaviour and why he is being punished:

“He probably is telling the truth when he says he doesn’t know, why he does it, but then if someone can’t understand their behaviour I think to some extent it’s difficult to know if they can really be accountable for it, and I think the way that the school reacted probably didn’t help because they needed the sort of soft skills. I know they have to protect the other children, but it was so over the top. It kind I felt like it almost over shadowed what we were actually doing in the circle, because it was difficult to talk about what actually happened.” C4Vol1

They appeared to think that the punishment somehow stopped him having to reflect on what he had done. All Charlie could think about was the repercussions of the punishment and any other contemplative exercise was too difficult for him undertake at the same time.

As has been highlighted in Chapter 2, empathy has been used as a tool in sex offender treatment to help individuals understand the impact of their behaviour on others. However, this requires a degree of emotional understanding and certain language skills so that he/she can adequately express their comprehension and contrition (Ward and Durrant, 2013). For Charlie, there appeared to be an additional requirement, an opportunity to reflect without being beset by other emotional concerns. This ability to understand or accurately express emotions appeared to be a problem for all Primrose core members, but was particularly difficult for Charlie as is shown in these second focus group comments:

“We did ask him; “how do think the other person sort of felt?” He would just say one word answers. C4Vol1

Or like why he did it and he just said he was bored I think, one of the options, one of the words was bored. C4Vol2

... I know that he knew what he was doing was wrong. I can’t tell if he knew what he did was wrong because he really understands why it’s wrong or just because he has been punished.” C4Vol1

The volunteers tried to talk about this issue on numerous occasions and found that Charlie either withdrew (was uncommunicative) or gave guarded answers, replying in a way he thought would satisfy the volunteers. I would argue that it

is only natural for those who want to work in a restorative manner (volunteers) to endeavour to promote greater core member understanding. It is logical that those volunteers who seek to “help” via rehabilitation and reconciliation would explore certain quasi psychological tools that appear to be an alternative to constant inquisition. Yet such tools can be difficult to manage and may prove harmful, especially to an already heavily stigmatised person who has a limited capacity to engage with such concepts. This questioning of the use of empathy should perhaps then further call into debate the issue of accountability. This is because the volunteers, who are mainly lay individuals (those without psychological, professional qualifications), were trying to use a psychological device to make accountability work. I would argue that as the model seeks to use relatively untrained community volunteers, whose success is due to their non-professional status, the concepts they work with should be understandable and easily applied, even if their application is to a complex group. Furthermore, empathy, like accountability, has the possibility of derailing circle relationships and its effectiveness in helping those who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour is now under scrutiny (Mann and Barnett, 2012).

Primrose Core Members’ Cognitive, Comprehension and Language Skills

All the Primrose volunteers acknowledged that their core members had considerable problems communicating and understanding issues. One of the greatest and continuing concerns voiced by the volunteers and discussed throughout this chapter was whether they could explain to the core member the concept of accountability and how this applied to him. This issue was raised in all the initial focus groups and the extract below from a Circle 3 volunteer is fairly representative of the worries of many of the other volunteers:

“What if they don't understand something, what we are making them accountable for, what if they don't understand all the implications of what they have done or what they have been through and we are trying to make him aware of his responsibility, if the communication does not go well, it is going to be difficult to actually hold him accountable for anything” C3Vol4

In all of the Primrose CoSAs, and throughout the programme, the volunteers found the communication and language abilities of their core members difficult to gauge and respond to. The actual nature of the core member's communication issues was not always initially evident and at times caused friction within the circle. The following extract (from a second focus group) is a conversation between two volunteers in Circle 1 about their attempts to explain consent particularly in relation to age, and highlights the tension between the volunteers:

"I think we probably sort of misjudged a lot of the ways in which we have tried to talk about things you know we overestimated his understanding We have tried to raise issues about sex and sex education, and consent and sexuality. C1Vol1

Which he ignored." C1Vol4

This quotation and my observations suggest that the volunteers in Circle 1 disagreed about Joe's ability to engage with them on certain subjects. One volunteer (C1Vol4) was more inclined than the other volunteers to believe that Joe chose not to engage which caused friction within the group. Despite this scepticism about Joe's understanding, the volunteers in Circle 1 changed how they worked with accountability. They tried to communicate in a non-confrontational appropriate and relevant manner (as discussed earlier). However, by trying to make Joe, feel accountable, or acknowledge that his relationship with his ex-girlfriend was 'wrong', the volunteers created a degree of hostility that they struggled with throughout the circle. It was not that he was incapable of acknowledging responsibility. The volunteers were more productive in inspiring accountability in respect of his child, whom he visited on a regular basis with their encouragement. Therefore it could be argued that he was not totally resistant to the concept of accountability or responsibility, but he needed to understand why he was being held accountable for a particular action. Communicating the reasons for the need for accountability had to factor in not only the core member's cognitive abilities, but also his life and social experiences. Therefore for Joe, explanations had to be in terms that he could appreciate (highlighting the girl's vulnerability) rather just statements of numerical factors and legal prohibitions.

Frequently the Primrose core members, despite the outward signs of comprehension, experienced problems finding the vocabulary and emotional resource they needed to talk about difficult topics. In Circle 4, the volunteers adopted certain strategies to aid not only communication, but mitigate the confrontational nature of this communication. This played to Charlie's strengths and allowed him to participate in discussions. This circle used games to tap into Charlie's "*articulate*" (C4Vol1) nature. These games involved talking about issues such as, relationships and feelings and enabled him to contribute without feeling exposed. The games also allowed the volunteers to gently break through certain emotional barriers and build a trusting relationship with Charlie, as suggested here:

"[Games are] a creative way of getting him to talk and think. If there's an activity, he opens up, it kind of it doesn't make him feel like the pressure is on him." C4Vol1

However, whilst the volunteers in this circle did indicate that they had managed to breakthrough certain emotional barriers, his language skills often inhibited his responses. They endeavoured to help with his lack of language by suggesting words, but Charlie appeared to merely react in a way he thought they required, but without understanding either the response requirement or the word he had chosen to use in response.

Language was not only an issue for the youngest core member, but also a topic which surfaced in other circles. In Circle 3, which was for Alex, the oldest core member, one of the volunteers spoke about his limited language skills when discussing (in the second focus group) his successes:

"I think his vocabulary can't allow him to really express how proud he is of himself." C3Vol3

The volunteers in Circle 2 discovered that their core member found group conversations difficult. This was because he processed language at a relatively slow rate, therefore numerous people speaking at the same time confused him. This meant he sought out individuals or smaller groups to discuss difficult topics. This is outlined in this comment from a volunteer in their second focus group:

“He said before that he finds it easier to talk in a small group as opposed to a big group cause I think he finds it difficult to sort of follow what everyone is saying.” C2Vol3

Once appreciated, this method of managing a language issue was accepted and utilised. However, it did initially cause concern for one of the volunteers who saw it as a potential risk issue. This is further discussed in Chapter 7 on risk.

In Circle 1, Joe’s language problems only became truly evident when one of the volunteers spent considerable time with him at court. As she stated (in the second focus group) she was “*astonished*” (C1Vol1) at his lack of language skills. She suggested that this problem was due both to his disability and his lack of socialisation from an early age. She concluded with the following statement:

“He has got a very poor understanding of what words should sound like and his ability to understanding things really is impaired, and he can function [only] at a very superficial level. C1Vol1

This statement may have been highlighted by his response to his court case, which would be particularly difficult for any young man, but it was also a reflection of his interaction with anything outside his particular comfort zone. Therefore it is not surprising that the Primrose core members responded to accountability driven discussions by withdrawing or not turning up for meetings. They were using the tools available to them to avoid situations which they felt incapable of responding to.

Conclusion

Accountability is a flexible concept which appears to be influenced by moral, ethical, social and political ideas (Hannem, 2013; Ward and Durrant, 2013). Within the traditional CoSA, accountability is viewed as a risk management tool, due to its monitoring and reporting functions (McCartan, 2016; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). Yet the ambiguity as to the scope and character of accountability has been reflected in the other UK CoSA studies (McCartan, 2016; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). Supposedly, accountability enables the volunteers to provide instruction

to the core member in the management of his own risks, ie to make/help him recognise and mitigate risks in order to prevent reoffending (Circles UK, 2015; Gray, 2005; 2007). This seems to promote the view that the volunteers need to be challenging and confrontational implying that the core member fully understands the nature and impact of his behaviour (Armstrong and Wills, 2014). However, as has been shown from the above discussions of the Primrose CoSAs, such forced comprehension is unlikely to happen with young people with learning disabilities. Inevitably such heavy handed accountability led to tensions between the relational prerequisite for both support and effective accountability.

The tension inherent in the use of accountability was initially recorded by many of the Primrose volunteers. However, by the time of the second set of focus groups, the nature of accountability had changed. For them, their core member changed from being a 'sex offender' to a vulnerable and "*likeable young man*" (C1Vol3). Their view of accountability evolved and became more about "helping" their core member to understand the dangers and pitfalls of certain behaviour. However, what should be recognised is that the Primrose Project management team facilitated the adaptation of accountability within their CoSAs, albeit after a process of evolution. Arguably such evolution has been allowed to happen because the Primrose Project management team does not have formal or philosophical connections to the criminal justice system.

The Primrose volunteers, using their ability to shape the model, responded to the fact that the core members were vulnerable individuals. There was a willingness from all parties to work with support as much as accountability. Furthermore, although many of those within the Primrose Project engaged with the need for accountability, they viewed this through a supportive and relational lens as suggested by Jackie:

"Through support comes accountability and through there being a mutual recognition of the importance of support that enables a conversation to take place ... So if you have a relationship with somebody and they know that you care about them it puts you in a very strong position when it comes to saying you know you need to think about ... your behaviour."
(Jackie)

For two of the circles, Circles 1 and 3, the volunteers reflected in their final focus groups that they felt their core member had achieved a degree of accountability. However, unsurprisingly these developments are closely associated with the support the circle was able to provide. This is highlighted by this comment from a Circle 1 volunteer:

“It started off that we have got to make him accountable for his actions, then actually we realised that as we got to know him, and we developed a relationship, the support got more and he became more accountable himself. Self-regulating and accountable, and would tell us things.”

C1Vol3

Many of the Primrose volunteers discovered that due to the core member's disability they had problems with communication and understanding and that despite their best efforts they could not always develop the requisite degree of awareness (Roche, 2003). However, again these issues were mitigated to some extent by a supportive relationship. The fact that the Primrose volunteers were able to appreciate and factor in issues sympathetically only happened when their core members had allowed them to see the extent of their disability. They trusted them sufficiently to appear vulnerable.

It was recognised by all the participants of my research that accountability, albeit in a more educative or supportive guise, could only be managed within a strong caring relationship, as has been acknowledged in many CoSA and reintegrative studies (Braithwaite, 1989, Fox, 2015, 2016 and 2017; Hannem, 2013). It was also recognised within the Primrose Project that these relationships could not be professional relationships, but needed to be genuine social associations. This was very much the case for the Primrose core members due to their extended exposure, often negative, to professional relationships. This supportive and 'normative' relationship with the Primrose CoSAs gave the volunteers the authority to use accountability. Equally there had to be a degree of social connection on the part of the volunteers. They had to see past the 'sex offender' label and view the core member as something more than a public protection risk requiring neutralization and management (Williams and Nash, 2014: 6).

The discussion of accountability in this chapter has shown the difficulty experienced by both Primrose core member and volunteers utilising this concept. Therefore if it is support that underpins and sustains the CoSA model the question must be; what does accountability provide? If it is purely a managerial tool that requires a degree of reflective understanding to produce any benefit, then its use within CoSAs for young people with learning disabilities becomes unsupportable and punitive.

The next chapter will explore risk and risk management in the Primrose Project and how it influenced the volunteers in the execution of their responsibilities within the model.

Chapter 7

'Risk' and 'Risk' Management

Introduction

The two previous chapters examined the support and accountability approaches used in the Primrose CoSA model. These chapters reviewed how the model has been adapted to respond to the requirements of a group of young men who have learning disabilities, and how the tensions created in these two very different devices were managed within the Primrose Project. Risk and risk management is mentioned throughout these two chapters and has been discussed in detail in Chapter 2. The CoSA model, as with other UK risk management strategies (such as, the introduction of MAPPA) was established to further public protection by reducing the risk of future sexual abuse (Circles UK, 2015; Kemshall and Maguire, 2001). This chapter considers where risk and risk management fits within the Primrose CoSA model, drawing evidence from data collected in the focus groups, interviews, observations and case files.

Circles UK are unequivocal about the role of risk management within the CoSA, stating in their National Coordinators' Training Handbook that Circles of Support and Accountability exist to enhance the risk management of those sexual offenders living in the community (Circles UK, ND: 16). This status has been confirmed within CoSA studies undertaken in conjunction with governmental organisations (McCartan *et al.*, 2014), third parties (Armstrong and Wills, 2014), CoSA projects (Banks *et al.*, 2015) and academic organisations (Thomas *et al.*, 2014). This chapter will initially consider the social constructions of both sex offenders and people with learning disabilities to commence the exploration of the research question: "*How does this type of CoSA, one for young people with learning disabilities who have exhibited sexually harmful behaviour, fit within the risk management paradigm?*" These constructions are relevant when exploring the possible risk implications for those involved with the Primrose CoSAs. This is because these constructions will imply a level of risk which influences the management requirements and possible adaptations to the model. I will argue that there is a conflict between the two constructions which causes both tension and relief, especially for the Primrose volunteers.

Once the dynamics and risk implications of these two constructions have been explored, the chapter will briefly consider 'risk' as a general concept, having fully discussed this in Chapter 2, and how the elevated risk management requirement for certain dangerous, high risk groups, such as sex offenders is evidenced in the Primrose CoSAs (Feeley and Simon, 1992). A further discussion will highlight how risk management is embodied in the Primrose CoSAs through their processes, particularly the continual monitoring of on-going core member risk factors. This chapter will concentrate on how the risk paradigm and its management affects the Primrose circles. This will include how the CoSA principle of 'no more victims' steers the programme not merely towards risk management, but also prevention. Therefore, making the British model a risk adverse, albeit politically justifiable, programme (Hannem, 2013). The chapter will finally consider how this risk philosophy shapes the CoSA and how it affects both the Primrose volunteers and the core members within this study.

Constructions

It is important to consider the general constructions of the term 'sex offender' (or for the purpose of this study someone exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour) and 'learning disabilities' because this will have an effect on how those with such labels are viewed and treated. This is particularly pertinent when exploring 'risk' as both of these labels will have associated risk expectations which will have an influence on all the Primrose Project participants. Furthermore the social construction of these groups has a particular impact upon, not only how 'risky' they are judged to be, but also whether they are worthy of redemption and therefore support.

Implications of the Sex Offender Construction

From the outset of the Primrose Project, the influence of media driven concepts and preconceptions were evident (Kitzinger, 2004). This is demonstrated by several comments made by the volunteers at the beginning of their circles. It was apparent that many implicitly considered sexually harmful behaviour to

predominantly relate to offences against children. These impressions remained with the volunteers throughout their involvement with the project. However, by the end of their circles many volunteers had developed a more challenging and dissociative view of such constructions. This was evidenced by the following comment made by a volunteer from Circle 1:

"I think when you think of sexually harmful behaviour, you think someone who is hunting children in the playground." C1Vol2

This statement was made in the final focus group when reflecting on the differences in perception and reality. The volunteer was suggesting that initially all the volunteers in his circle had a particular view of a 'sex offender' and his/her offence. However, he acknowledged that through their exposure to the circle and model they discovered that this perception could be incorrect. All the volunteers in that group agreed at the end of their circle that their core member was not as they had imagined:

"I expected because it was going to be someone with sexually harmful behaviour ... I think predatory [was] my immediate thing, was I [going to] be working with a paedophile ... so it was almost quite a pleasantly surprise ... there was a young chap with, I would argue, mild learning disabilities and yeah, it wasn't this kind of Daily Mail frenzy; "he is a crazy, predatory nutter" ... and that is the thing, he wasn't." C1Vol3

This comment not only details how the volunteer had to reassess his evaluation of working with the core member, but acknowledges the part the media plays in his original construction. This was further recognised by another volunteer in Circle 2 in his first focus group:

"Working with those offenders who are the typical "Daily Mail - Satan's" and you think these people are totally different, you cannot understand them in any way, you can't make any concessions for them." C2Vol3

However, not all of the Primrose volunteers agreed with these media driven images, some reflected that this perception was extreme or inaccurate. Therefore some Primrose volunteers were more aware of the possible discrepancy between the socially constructed 'sex offender' and reality. This may have been because of their backgrounds. With the exception of one, all the

volunteers had been educated to degree level and many had studied criminology at either degree or masters levels. Others, six of the 20 volunteers, had worked with those who had been prosecuted and/or convicted of sexual offences. Therefore their points of reference were not merely media driven, but included both academic and real life experiences. This would appear to have some connection with McCartan *et al.*'s (2015:102) argument that particular groups of individuals, those with higher educational and "socioeconomic status", may be less likely to resort to the standard stereotype.

However, regardless of the volunteers' personal perceptions of sexual offenders, all recognised the general negative social construction associated with this group. This meant that many of the Primrose volunteers worried about telling others that they were volunteering in a programme which supported such individuals. As highlighted by Goffman (1963) and Kotova, (2014) they were concerned that they would be stigmatized due to their association with and willingness to support such individuals. This may have been particularly true for the male Primrose volunteers. This concern was highlighted in an interview with one of the male volunteers. He was worried some people, particularly older male family members, may believe he had a degree of sympathy or tolerance for the sexually harmful behaviour:

"What do they think, that I am doing this because it is understandable or that it could be accepted? You know, like it was an alright acceptable behaviour or something?" C2Vol1/C3Vol5

These fears meant that initially he only confided in those he knew would be sympathetic to the programme, his female relations. Such apprehensions could partially explain the general difficulty traditional UK CoSA projects have recruiting male volunteers (Banks *et al.*, 2015; McCartan, 2016; Thomas *et al.*, 2014). Yet, interestingly the Primrose CoSAs had a significantly greater proportion of male volunteers than traditional CoSAs as detailed in Chapter 3 on the parties. An explanation for this will be touched on later in this chapter.

This concern about the response of others resulted in many volunteers (both male and female) being guarded about who they told about their volunteering. This was despite the positive image benefits that can be gained from volunteering (Carpenter and Knowles Myers, 2010). Many Primrose volunteers

chose not to tell others of their involvement in the project, or if they did they would produce an edited version of who they were working with. They frequently omitted mentioning the sexual nature of the harmful behaviour. This is shown in these extracts from volunteers in Circles 2 and 4 in their second focus groups:

"I have never introduced the topic as I am working with a sex offender, but I am working with a young person with learning disabilities who has sexually harmful behaviour." C2Vol3

"I think that maybe a couple of times [at work] when people have asked me I've not gone in to all the full detail ... I just say I'm just doing some volunteering with youths who have learning difficulties who [have] displayed some sort of worrying behaviours and sort of leave it at that." C4Vol1

Therefore for many of the Primrose volunteers, working with those who have exhibited sexually harmful behaviour appeared to be something that needed careful justification and negotiation, especially when talking to others. This meant that to protect themselves they often told those outside the programme either nothing or a modified version of reality. This allowed them to participate in something which they appeared to feel strongly about and manage these social difficulties. As the volunteer above suggested in the same focus group, it means that others are not; *"judging you for helping [someone] for what is not socially acceptable."* C4Vol1

The central CoSA objective of prevention or 'no more victims' also helped the Primrose volunteers explain their involvement in the Primrose Project. Prevention has a significant role in the risk management paradigm and is fundamental to CoSA political and social discourses (Hannem, 2013; Richards and McCartan, 2017). The idea of potentially being able to prevent certain behaviours was highlighted by several of the Primrose volunteers and co-ordinators. It was not only a theme that drew them to the model, but one that followed their thinking throughout the CoSA process. The following two comments are from two volunteers from Circles 3 and 4 suggesting that prevention is a part of the Primrose CoSA. They used prevention as a method of justifying their involvement with the model to third parties, possibly making

their volunteering more socially understandable. This first statement is from the male volunteer, who was mentioned earlier, who appeared to have concerns with the previously discussed concept of ‘courtesy stigma’ (Goffman, 1963):

“The whole reason why you do the monitoring and mentoring thing is because it is prevention and helping the community. Helping preventing it happening again and that is the whole idea of it.” C2Vol1/C3Vol5

The following is a similar comment by a female volunteer in Circle 4’s final focus group:

“When you do tell people they are genuinely very interested and they do think it is a better idea to have an intervention as well. I think that is one of the reasons why, it is not so much about criminal justice, but about preventing [the offence] in the first place.” C4Vol1

This feeling of shame or stigmatisation due to participation in the CoSA model was also recognised by a Primrose core member. This is illustrated (in a second focus group discussion) when a volunteer from Circle 2 indicated that Tad had tried to distinguish himself from a ‘sex offender’. In a meeting he highlighted to the volunteers that he had read a newspaper article about a rapist and that rape was a terrible thing. This volunteer felt that the core member needed to; *“bring it up, to say ... he knew that it was wrong”* (C2Vol/C3Vol5).

These concerns show that the CoSA model, even one for those with learning disabilities, has the power to label all of those involved. Therefore there is the possibility that the Primrose core members felt they had been labelled as a ‘sex offender’, despite never having been prosecuted for a sexual offence. Interestingly, this labelling did not overly concern the Primrose Project management team. On discussing the negative effects that the core member would experience on being labelled a ‘sex offender’, it was suggested that the programme was a suitable environment in which to explore this issue. It was argued that the core members needed to know that if they continued with their harmful behaviour it could lead to such a label. However, it was emphasised that this issue needed to be dealt with in a safe, non-judgmental environment where such a label could, after discussion, be safely repudiated and discarded. Yet the acknowledgement of such a label could result in problems with self-

esteem and shame, resulting in the volunteers having to work harder and longer to develop the trusting relationship.

A further possible negative effect of such a label was that it could result in the core member rejecting advice and/or support if he felt that guidance was something that could connect him to, or be derived from, the 'sex offender' label. This may have been why Joe would not listen to or participate in any form of sex education discussions. He was often absent from such scheduled discussion meetings. The volunteers recognised that they had had limited success with this subject. It could be argued that Joe rejected this support because if he had accepted it he may have felt he had acquiesced to the label of 'sex offender'. However, it should also be noted that the rejection of this advice may have not only been due to the subject matter, but could have been because of Joe's relationship with the volunteer primarily offering the assistance in this area. Furthermore, as already suggested in Chapter 6, this could also be Joe's coping strategy when dealing with difficult and shame inducing situations.

Disability and its Relationship to Sexually Harmful Behaviour

Disability stereotypes, like the social constructions of 'sex offenders', are numerous and although not explicitly highlighted were evident from many of the Primrose volunteer focus groups and interviews. One of the main stereotypes was that of a general lack of, or reduced, understanding or innocence (Block, 2014). This lack of understanding, whether perceived or real, was a common perception for most of the Primrose volunteers and one I found myself sharing, due to my observational role. This is further discussed in Chapter 4 on my research design and methodology. This volunteer view of the core member's naivety was important for the Primrose CoSAs as it mitigated the calculative and manipulative construction associated with the sex offender label (Matravers, 2003). This was highlighted by one of the volunteers in Circle 2's first focus group when discussing how he thought working with a core member who had learning disabilities would be different:

"Whatever has happened it is not as calculative as some offences are usually." C2Vol1/C3Vol5

This deviation from the stereotype of a calculative sex offender meant that the Primrose volunteers felt justified in granting the core members concessions and greater understanding. As suggested by a volunteer in Circle 2's first focus group, this lack of design or understanding associated with learning disability changed how the core member and his actions should be viewed:

"It is not so obvious that what they did was morally wrong or it was an affront to society ... there is so many complex issues in terms of their own culpability. It is very different." C2Vol3

The recognition that there may have been factors other than the core member being "evil" or "monstrous" (Pickett *et al.*, 2013; 734) helped the volunteers move past the sex offender construction and develop a degree of empathy. This assisted early relational developments within the Primrose CoSAs which may not be true of traditional CoSAs.

Early on in my study, there was also a recognition that some of the stereotypes attached to those with learning disabilities and their desire to be sexually active were inaccurate (Harris and Tough, 2004). Several volunteers felt that the denial of sexual expression was damaging and could in some way have contributed to the core members' problems. This was stated by a volunteer in Circle 4's first focus group:

"I kind of found that people with learning disabilities, the idea of their sexuality was completely swept under the carpet and did not want to be acknowledged in any way. That in itself is very dangerous." C4Vol1

The mitigation offered by the common learning disability construction of naivety and the suggestion that denial of sexual expression was harmful enabled the volunteers to see past the traditional sex offender construction. It implied that sexually harmful behaviour, particularly for those with learning disabilities, was more complicated than a simple evil and manipulative definition. This implicitly empowered some Primrose volunteers to talk to others about the programme. They felt able to discuss their volunteering often phrasing it in terms of working with young people with learning disabilities who had problematic behaviour. This not only potentially mitigated the sexual offending associated stigma, but also took their volunteering into the realms of socially understandable and

praiseworthy, as highlighted by this Circle 2 volunteer's comment in his first focus group:

"I have spoken to quite a few people about it and I think when you explain it is young people with learning difficulties it becomes easier for them to understand. I think it would be different ... if I was working with an adult, paedophile. I think it would be difficult to speak about it, people would understand less." C2Vol3

This statement was made by a male volunteer. It not only helps to justify working with young people with learning disabilities, but creates a degree of distinction between supporting his core member and an "adult paedophile". Therefore this possibly explains why the Primrose CoSAs attract more male volunteers than traditional CoSAs.

What Risk was the Primrose Core Member?

As detailed in Chapter 2, the CoSA model is rooted in a society which assembles individuals into groups of those who are considered a 'risk' and then seeks to manage this risky group (Feeley and Simon, 1992). Therefore a CoSA, whilst couched in the language of restorative justice, is predominantly a community offender risk management programme (Armstrong and Wills, 2014; McCartan, *et al.*, 2014; Wilson *et al.*, 2010). It is also well documented that CoSAs, because of their finite nature, are used for those sex offenders who are considered to be medium to high risk offenders (Armstrong, *et al.*, 2008; Hannem and Petrunik 2007; Wilson *et al.*, 2010). Therefore those who work with circles would be justified in assuming that they would be working with a high risk individual. Accordingly, then there was an implicit assumption that the core members referred to the Primrose Project had been assessed and evaluated and referral was due to the potential high to medium risk of them effecting further sexually harmful behaviour.

Referral

The referral process for the Primrose CoSA's has been described in Chapter 4 and mentioned in Chapter 3. It is further discussed here to reflect its part within the risk evaluation and management process of Primrose CoSAs. The Primrose Project case files showed that only Alex had been referred via the traditional MAPPA and probation route, due to his release into the community after serving a sentence for a sexual offence. All of the other Primrose core members were referred by social or educational services having exhibited 'sexually harmful behaviour' on one or more occasions.

Two core members, Joe and Tad, appeared to have been referred because of impending changes in their lives. These were viewed to be possible trigger events. Joe was being rehoused in an adult residential environment leaving the young person's hostel he had lived in for the preceding four years. This environment and the staff involved in running the facility had provided him with a degree of stability which he was about to leave behind. Tad was about to start a vocational educational course. He found change difficult to manage, due to his experience with bullies. The referring authorities for both these core members had assessed that these changes could induce unpredictable and potentially harmful behaviour. This view could have also been influenced by advice from the Primrose management team who required referrals for their new pilots and had funding to support such referrals. Charlie was referred because of his continuing sexually harmful behaviour at school and what appeared to be the school's lack of expertise in addressing this behaviour.

This suggests that initially referral to the Primrose Project was not due to a common set of criteria or that the individual was a 'high' risk. All that can be said was that a form of assessment had been completed, the core members had been considered a risk and there appeared to be a means of addressing this risk. I would further argue that the Primrose CoSAs enabled the referring authority to not only put a tick in a box (showing the risk had been evaluated and managed), but also provided a way of passing the risk onto an external organisation. This dysfunctional and risk avoidant method of working was suggested by Jackie in this extract when talking about third party agencies:

“[they] just think their job is about ticking boxes and pointing people in a different direction away from themselves.” Jackie

However, whilst referring organisations may have responded in an attempt to address a risk which, up until this point, had limited options of management, what they may not have considered was the appropriateness of such a programme. The traditional CoSA programme is both restrictive and punitive and designed for high/medium risk adult offenders. In their enthusiasm to find something which offered the possibility of managing the risks created by a combination of learning disabilities and sexually harmful behaviour, other considerations may appear secondary.

However this meant that in the attempt to tick a box, or get a model up and running, consistency and proportionality may have been put to one side. For three of the four Primrose core members, it could be argued that the necessity was due, in part, to the fact that there were few other options available to them. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that despite the therapeutic philosophy behind the Primrose CoSA, the UK model is very much tied to the criminal justice system (McCartan *et al.*, 2014; McCartan, 2016). Therefore including those who had not been subject to criminal processes was widening the net of this criminal justice programme (Cohen, 1985).

Despite the CoSA models links to the criminal justice system, which may not have been obvious to the referring body, it could be suggested that provision of the Primrose CoSAs and referral to them had a preventative objective. This preventative aim would have potentially been two-fold. Firstly, to prevent the core member participating in any future sexually harmful behaviour. Secondly, and unlike traditional CoSA objectives, to stop the core member being either initially or further drawn into the formal criminal justice system (a system that is ill equipped to understand or respond sensitively or fairly to those with disabilities (Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities, 2012)). As highlighted in Chapter 2 the preventative objective is understandable and plays directly into political, social and personal desires (Ashworth and Zedner, 2014). However, this conclusion (that the core member is likely to offend) will have been established through some sort of risk assessment which is not a prediction of fact, but an estimate of probability based on a series of generalisations (Case and Haines, 2009). Furthermore, these assessments, due to their simplistic

nature, may be incapable of factoring in complicated non-standard issues that are particularly pertinent to those with a learning disability. An illustration of how a risk evaluation process was used and produced a potentially deleterious and counter intuitive response was highlighted in Circle 4. Charlie who after an incident at school and an evaluation of his risks was to be sent to a specialist residential school. This action was seen by the Primrose volunteers as excessive. They felt that the assessment inducing this decision had not factored in or acknowledged the reasons for Charlie's behaviour, or the harmful consequences of him leaving home. This was potentially because there was no criteria within the assessment to acknowledge Charlie's situation or cognitive coping strategies. At the time of the incident Charlie had been worried about being sent back into care. These worries were heightened due to discussions between social services and his mother. His mother was not coping with the situation very well. These conditions made his behaviour erratic and unpredictable. Sadly his resulting actions caused the very thing he was dreading to happen; separation from his mother (Circle 4 case file). The volunteers in this circle were scathing about the whole assessment process. They felt that instead of constructively addressing and working with Charlie the school/educational authorities had used the process to avoid a complex individual facing a set of difficult conditions. They felt that staying in the circle and working with both parent and child would have been a more productive way of addressing Charlie's behaviour.

How did the Primrose CoSAs Manage the Core Member's Risks?

Strategies to manage risk are embedded within the standard traditional CoSA processes which have been mirrored, to a large extent, in the Primrose CoSAs. Risk management runs through training, documentation and processes, all of which are audited on a regular basis by Circles UK to ensure conformity to core concepts and principles (CE, 2011). The initial CoSA disclosure meeting is mentioned in both Chapter 6 on accountability and this chapter as it highlights two points. Chapter 6 considers the confessional benefits and the concerns generated by a 'disclosure meeting' whereas in this chapter it is mentioned to highlight its risk management potential.

Risk Management in the CoSA Meetings

As noted, the first full CoSA meeting is potentially the 'disclosure meeting' and has been discussed extensively in Chapters 4 and 6. However, it is worth noting within this chapter that the disclosure, whether it is with the core member present or not, can play a considerable part in facilitating the risk management objectives of the CoSA. This is because it is not only the core member's sexually harmful behaviour that is discussed, but also his/her presumed triggers and any ongoing concerns. Therefore, implying a need to be vigilant, suggesting that by monitoring behaviours it is possible to prevent further sexually harmful behaviour. These discussions are prior to the formation of any relationship with the core member and will have been outlined to the volunteers in terms of a set of risks.

After the disclosure meetings, the Primrose volunteers and core member met weekly. Each of these weekly meetings were concluded with the drafting of a set of minutes by the volunteers which are sent to the co-ordinator. There was a specific template for these minutes (see Appendix 10), which was frequently, but not always used. The template had a designated section for risks. So even if there was no mention of particular risks in the body of the minutes, the volunteers were driven, by the form, to consider any possible risk related concerns. On receipt of a copy of the minutes the Primrose co-ordinator evaluated whether the noted risks, which could be anything, required further attention and/or disclosure to other external professionals (social workers, probation officers or the police). An example of this was in Circle 2, where Tad mentioned, to one of the volunteers in his circle, that he often played with younger children. This comment was not only mentioned in the meeting minutes, but was escalated to the co-ordinator by a volunteer (C2Vol5) via email. The details were then passed on to an external safeguarding team, despite all those involved recognising that the core member had a problem engaging with peers of his own age, due to a fear of being bullied.

The volunteer (C2Vol5) who escalated this matter to the co-ordinator, worked within the criminal justice system. She was concerned not only about the content of the disclosure, but the way the revelation had been made. Tad had mentioned playing with younger children outside of the formal meeting environment when they were travelling home. The volunteer was worried about

the “*integrity of the group*” (Circle 2 case file; C2Vol5) as Tad had singled her out to talk to. For her, this was a strong indication of possible risk. Interestingly one of the other volunteers had a different explanation for the core members need to seek out volunteers by themselves. This was due to his language skills rather than his need to be secretive (as highlighted in Chapter 6 on accountability).

This particular incident happened shortly after the volunteer (C2Vol5) joined Circle 2. She was allocated to the circle to not only take the place of a departing volunteer and balance the gender equation, but to potentially refocus the circle by utilising her professional experience with respect to risk management. The following extract from Helen’s interview highlights this:

“It will be interesting having [C2Vol5] in it. She is quite different to the rest of them. She is also young, but she is a prison worker. ...In the [training role plays] she was interrogating the person. So she will have a slightly different approach, but then again she might also challenge everyone else a little bit.” Helen

Helen was, as suggested by Hannen and Petrunik (2007: 168), reconfiguring the circle’s volunteer composition as “a direct response to the acknowledgement of risk”. The inclusion of this volunteer seems to suggest that Helen was willing to exploit the volunteers professional risk management experience, thereby possibly negating some of the valuable social aspects of the circle. This may have been because of Helen’s desire to achieve ‘no more victims’ through more active core member scrutiny (Helen’s background and motivations are highlighted in Chapter 3 on the parties). However, interestingly after a period of settling in this volunteer responded sympathetically to Tad. She asked more searching questions, but in a way that felt like a “*normal conversation*” (C2Vol4). I would argue that after spending time with Tad she saw him as a vulnerable young man who needed support rather than as a ‘risky’ individual. Furthermore, she remains in contact with Tad and continues to support him despite the closure of the circle and has joined another circle run by the Primrose management team.

Evaluating and Promoting Changes

A standard part of the Circles UK CoSA process is the regular completion of a dedicated risk assessment tool, the Dynamic Risk Review (DRR) (Bates and Wagner, 2012). DRRs were completed by the Primrose co-ordinator in conjunction with the volunteers for three of the Primrose CoSAs (Circles 1, 2 and 3) and the associated scores were sent to Circles UK. However, the DRR was viewed as having limited value to the Primrose Project and dismissed as an inappropriate measurement tool by all the Primrose co-ordinators.

Despite its inappropriateness, the ‘quasi measurement’ of positive change produced by the DRR proved valuable within the Primrose CoSAs. The Primrose co-ordinators used the DRR not as a risk assessment tool per se, but as a method of considering how much the circle had, or had not, achieved with their core member. This is echoed in this comment from a volunteer in Circle 1 in their second focus group when discussing the DRR:

“I think it kind of gave us a chance to kind of reflect on the work we had been doing with him and how much he has matured and also kind of what he had gone through” C1Vol2

As previously stated, this circle focused on Joe’s risk of engaging in a sexual relationship with girls under 16 years of age. The volunteers struggled to engage with him on this matter and their progress often seemed piecemeal and fleeting. However, the DRR allowed them to not only acknowledge that his risk in this area appeared to be decreasing, but that his attitudes towards women had improved generally. The DRR gave the volunteers something tangible. Many volunteers worked with these sort of tools in their professional lives and initially found the absence of such evaluations disconcerting. However, after a period of adjustment and familiarisation they began to appreciate the benefit of personal interaction. They found that they slowly learnt who their core member was by communication rather than a set of evaluations, which revealed more than even the most comprehensive assessment. Even the volunteer who was most vocal about the absence of appropriate appraisals acknowledged that spending time with Joe meant he had discovered that he *“had learning disabilities in ways that I was not expecting”* (C1Vol4).

Both the DRR and the general circle reviews allowed a degree of positive reflection without which the volunteers may have struggled to notice improvements. This could have been due to the illusory and grandiose expectation of ensuring that there were 'no more victims', or answering the question as to whether the core member would ever be able to manage his own risks. Focusing on the developing strengths or improvements allowed the Primrose volunteers to recognise areas which they felt were important to the core member. They were not fixed to the prescriptive criteria of a standardised set of measures. This did not necessarily mean that the core member was no longer a risk, but it did mean that his life had theoretically improved which implied that he would be better able to desist future harmful behaviour. This bore a resemblance to the ideas behind the Good Lives Model (Ward and Maruna, 2007a and b).

One of the most debated developing strengths was the core member's enhanced ability to socialise. All the circles reported improvements in their core member's social skills as highlighted by this Circle 3 volunteer's statement in his final focus group:

"I think we saw a huge change in his ability to socialise." C3Vol3

Interestingly, the relationship between risk and socialisation was highlighted in a volunteer interview. The volunteer was one of the professionals who worked within the criminal justice system and due to her professional background was steeped in the risk management model. However, when asked how factors such as promoting confidence, self-esteem and enhancing social ability measured against risk in the circle, she stated:

"They might not necessarily be addressing the risk factors in terms like desistance or protective factors, but just in terms of his general well-being you know, his self-esteem can be risky, but he is building that ... aside from risk, it is something that is going to be invaluable to him."

C2Vol5

It is easy to see why a model embedded in the criminal justice system, whose priority is the prevention of reoffending can nullify small personal gains, like greater social abilities. However, for those like the Primrose core members (young and vulnerable individuals), it is important to acknowledge and nurture

these achievements. This is why the support arm of the model is so important in balancing not only the requirement of accountability, but also the negativity of viewing everything in terms of risk. This is especially true for someone with a learning disability who is vulnerable and isolated. It is support that allows him to engage and develop important life skills, not accountability or risk management. It is also support which helps him to address some of his risks. This is because unlike risk management or accountability support addresses some of the deprivations (isolation) which have resulted in him being involved in risky situations. Again we could apply this to Charlie's situation. If Charlie had been able to resolve his concerns about leaving his mother, though some form of supportive intervention then the incident at school may not have happened. The form of risk management adopted by the school (exclusion) did not appear to help or prevent the incident.

The Subjectivity of Risk and Risk Management

When the Primrose volunteers started their CoSA, questions of risk will have been localised around the potential of the core member committing some form of sexually harmful behaviour. However, as they became more aware of their core members' circumstances and abilities, they began to realise that 'risk' was a complicated and subjective concept. Three volunteers who worked within the criminal justice system voiced their concerns early on in the process. They worried that other volunteers may not appreciate their risk averse positions. This was highlighted in Circle 3's first focus group:

"I would feel like there are just some things that are non-negotiable and have to be reported and my big fear [is that] there would be someone here who would be against that reporting" C3Vol2

One volunteer (C2Vol5) acknowledged that her specialised knowledge meant that she saw things differently. She initially felt that her circle spent too much time having "*casual chats about football/catering etc.*" (Circle 2 case file; C2Vol5), rather than talking about issues connected to his sexually harmful behaviour. Yet despite her training and experience, she acknowledged the balance between appearing punitive and managing risk was difficult. For her, risk was something that both volunteers and core member needed to fully

appreciate in order to be able to effectively explore issues. She suggested that due to either a lack of training or understanding both the other volunteers in her circle and Tad struggled to proficiently manage certain risk issues. Conversely, I would suggest that this could have been a positive, as it reinforced their volunteer position. She also acknowledged that for Tad, due to both his age and communication abilities, risk focused discussions could have had a detrimental impact, particularly on his self-esteem. In this interview extract, the volunteer (C2Vol5) explains that she does not believe that Tad understands the concept of risk and that means he responds to the model in, an understandable, but inappropriate way:

“What you are asking is for him to bring issues which are ‘risky’ to that meeting, but if he does not have that awareness it is unsurprising that he uses it sometimes as a forum to talk about what he is doing at college or what he watched on TV and that is partly due to his age, but it is going to make it difficult for him to know what risk factors are.” C2Vol5

This comment links not only to the concept of risk, but also ties into the core members’ limited cognitive and linguistic skills, as discussed earlier in Chapter 6 on accountability. She felt (as shown in this interview extract) that not only did the core member struggle with risk, but this was not helped by the other volunteer’s limited understanding and experience with this concept:

“It can be difficult if his understanding is limited, but also if the people in the group themselves don't necessarily know what to look out for. Things could go sort of under the radar.” C2Vol5

This confusion as to the exact nature of risk and what to do about it was not isolated to Circle 2. Areas of risk highlighted within the Primrose CoSA files, focus groups and interviews were numerous. They encompassed factors often associated with re-offending such as drug and alcohol misuse, impulsivity and low self-control, social networks, family relationships, financial problems, changes in housing, lack of occupation (Ministry of Justice, 2013b: 5). Furthermore, other issues like isolation at school, not eating properly, tattoos and not turning up for meetings were also considered ‘risky’. Almost every issue had the potential of being a risk as shown in Helen’s interview extract when she was asked what she believed to be a risk:

“Its all sorts of risk, risk of reoffending, risk to themselves. Situations that they could be engaging in, like engaging in unprotected sex, getting tattoos or hanging out with the wrong group of people. Cause risk to themselves is also a risk of reoffending.” (Helen)

This shows how risks to the Primrose core members were also viewed as potential recidivism issues, showing that any situation which could infer a degree of risk should be viewed as having the potential of inducing an offence. This therefore appears to indicate that, like accountability, risk is a ‘malleable’ concept, capable of interpretation, often relying on an individual’s own personal constructions (O’Malley, 2004).

In some instances, the risk scenarios encountered by the Primrose volunteers initially appeared relatively simple. An example was when Alex communicated with a 16 year old girl whilst playing video games online. This situation has already been mentioned in Chapter 6 on accountability where it was highlighted that explaining the issue in terms of risk of offending and accountability was impossible. Therefore it was explained to the core member, and probably seen by the Primrose volunteers, as a risk of him going back to prison. This then begs the question as to what the real risk was and to whom?

Confusingly, sometimes a potential risk could be viewed as a possible safeguard against reoffending. This was debated in Circle 3’s second focus group when discussing a major concern about a new friendship group for Alex. It was agreed that the new group would help to build both Alex’s social skills and combat risks associated with isolation. However, there was a general consensus that the excessive spending and drinking they encouraged may be problematic:

“The only time I felt particularly concerned that we wouldn’t know or be able to help Alex was when he had made a new social group of friends and they were encouraging him to be going out and drinking. ... We didn’t want to warn him against having new friends, that was important for him to do, but actually the risks that could be attached to that became more apparent and to try and explain that to him without then going against everything we had said; “make new friends and establish yourself”. C3Vol1

This left one of the volunteers feeling that they had not dealt with the situation correctly. She felt that it needed to be highlighted to the Primrose co-ordinator as a potential risk, yet recognised that it should be an area of encouragement. This highlights how difficult it is to manage hypothetical risks. I would also argue that if the concept of risk was confusing for those who had both educational and intellectual advantages, it would have been an extremely difficult concept for the Primrose core member to understand. This raises questions as to whether any individual, disabled or not, is capable of understanding all risks (Kemshall and Wood, 2007: 208) and making associated rational choices (O'Malley, 2004). What would be rational choice for the dilemma above? The volunteers were potentially asking him to make a choice between 'risky' friends and no friends, without him really understanding the nature of the 'risk'. The concept of rational choice does not take into consideration those who do not have numerous options or limited analytical capabilities. Furthermore, ethical questions should be raised about whether it is 'right' to infer the central participant in a CoSA for a young person with a learning disability is cognitively or socially equipped to make appropriate, complicated and reflective decisions.

The struggle with the issue of beneficial and 'risky' friendships was debated in both Circles 1 and 3. The volunteers applied their own judgements as to whether these friendships were good or bad. Such judgements were moralistic in nature and based on their own social understanding of what constitutes a beneficial friendship. I have no doubt that the volunteers had the best interests of their core members at heart and will have wanted to limit the risk to both the core member and others. However, their assessments will have been based on their own social perspectives in a risk averse setting and therefore biased (Zedner, 2006).

The Unachievable Task of Risk Management

Both the Primrose volunteers and core members were subject to the concept of risk and risk management within their circles. It was a constant concern and manifested itself in many situations. However, the impact of risk was different for the volunteers and the core members, both of whom battled with the breadth and diversity of the consequences of trying to manage such an intangible

concept.

Volunteers

According to the Circles UK National Coordinators Training Handbook (Circles UK nd: 16) “it is vital to ensure that all prospective volunteers understand the process of risk management and also the importance of their role ... in enhancing the task of risk management by the statutory agencies”. However, for the Primrose volunteers risk was not positioned so prominently by the Primrose Project management team. Nevertheless, the volunteers were appraised of their risk management responsibilities from the outset, and these were sometimes re-iterated, if forgotten or ignored. This is highlighted in this extract from an interview with Helen in respect of Circle 2 a few months into their circle:

“I realised that they ... never talked about his offence, therefore they weren’t talking about his triggers, they weren’t really doing the risk management side of it.” (Helen)

Helen recognised the volunteers’ difficulty with this topic, but rather than allowing the circle to manage the situation felt it prudent to engage in a disclosure type conversation. This was despite the fact that Tad had never been convicted of an “offence”.

Many of the Primrose volunteers had been, and continued to be, involved with risk and risk management concepts within their professional lives. Therefore applying certain standards of risk management was not new or alien to them, but it did raise concerns. Within several Primrose circles, volunteers voiced fears about the potential failure on their part to recognise risks. The Primrose volunteers were concerned that they would be responsible for an offence that had resulted from a risk they had not recognised. The extract below taken from Circle 3’s first focus group highlights this concern:

“What happens in the next sort of six months ... if the core member re-offends, or if there are other issues that come up I think that there is an element of is that a failure on our part” C3Vol1

This volunteer concern is not limited to the Primrose Project (Thomas *et al.*, 2014). This feeling of fear, of not doing something correctly is not uncommon and is shared by many in a risk society. It is even more evident within particular

professional roles, such as probation officers and social workers (Kemshall and Maguire 2001; Stanford, 2010).

There was an underlying tension present at the beginning of the Primrose circles, with several volunteers voicing concerns about doing the job 'right' and what happened if they missed a 'risky' situation. For many Primrose volunteers this tension lessened as they progressed through the process. Issues were highlighted to the Primrose co-ordinator who took responsibility for the problem and helped the volunteers manage the situation. An instance of this has already been mentioned when the Primrose co-ordinator reported the fact that Tad played with younger children to a safeguarding team.

For Circle 3 the concern of not managing the risk correctly resurfaced again at the end of their circle when Alex recalled an incident in prison:

"He's said to us on quite a number of occasions that he wanted to tell us about his experience in prison. He said he thought he had killed somebody in prison which was an extraordinary thing to say. It was inconceivable that he did, but I wondered whether we should [have been] slightly more assertive. We tried to be assertive and I think that there is only so much you can do." C3Vol3

This shocking information caused the volunteer to question whether their circle had 'managed' Alex (and their responsibilities within the circle) appropriately and whether he was more of a risk than they had believed. This was despite the fact that the confession was dismissed by external professionals as incorrect. Several of whom suggested that it may have been a response (delaying tactic) to the circle coming to an end. Yet the spectre of missing risks, and the possible blame, was so great that this disclosure had caused this volunteer to question the management of their circle. He appeared to be willing to disregard much of the work, particularly supportive, they had done in the circle and suggest that they had not been "assertive" enough.

As suggested in this chapter and much of the literature explored in Chapter 2, the management of risk is a difficult if not impossible task, but by adding to this the concept of prevention ("no more victims") it makes the task seem even more onerous. It implies that if done properly the core member will not reoffend and that reoffending can be stopped by the correct management of the circle. This

meant that, like others working in the field of managing sex offenders, the volunteers were likely to make “defensive (as apposed to “defensible”) decisions” (Matravers, 2003:3). This management of risk is a huge burden for the volunteers. Therefore, it is understandable if the volunteers are cautious and view all issues as potential risks. It is also potentially another factor for volunteer “burnout” as mentioned in Chapter 5 on Support. As stated by Höing *et al.*, (2016a: 376), the responsibility of prevention can be a stressful undertaking especially where the core member’s problems have been caused and maintained by social, political and cultural factors.

Autonomy

Despite the above cautionary concerns, many Primrose volunteers felt confident enough to utilise the managerial autonomy that was available to them within their circles. Initially this was a surprising fact for the volunteers as highlighted in this extract from Circle 3’s initial focus group:

“The other thing I found very interesting was the level of autonomy that a circle can have” C3Vol3

This was indeed unexpected considering the degree of risk potential in the circles. I would argue that the self-governance displayed in the Primrose CoSAs was fostered by the fact that the core member was not viewed by any of the parties in the project as a high risk. This was further enhanced by the CoSAs group structure. All the Primrose volunteers felt comfortable working in a group, some even finding the breakup of the group for small social events disconcerting. This is shown in these comments from Circles 1, 2 and 3:

“[W]e do have a good relationship” C1Vol3

“[W]e we get on really well” C2Vol4

“I really love everyone here, because if someone is not around for a little while you kind of miss them ... it has been fine when we have had the small groups ... we have done a few of those and its fine, but I do enjoy just coming into the meeting.” C3Vol2

The reassurance offered by the group dynamic has already been discussed in Chapters 5 emphasising its importance in being able to support the core

member. However, I would argue that this collective approach also had an impact on the Primrose volunteers' risk management roles. They were able to disperse the responsibility for risk to not only the Primrose co-ordinator, but also other volunteers in their circle. I observed on occasions how volunteers would collectively devise ways of approaching and managing a risk. The Primrose volunteers remained in contact outside of the circle often debating and formulating approaches and strategies.

Logically the security felt by the Primrose volunteers, due to the supportive nature of the group, extended their ability to explore options with a degree of independence. It appeared, from much of the data that working as a group enhanced the volunteers' feelings of security. It could be argued that this feeling of security enabled the volunteers to exploit the autonomy available to them when managing their circles. This autonomy or freedom meant that they were able to respond to issues such as accountability and boundary management in a flexible and sensitive manner.

The autonomy experienced by the Primrose volunteers, if not encouraged, was accepted by the Primrose management team. The reasons behind this could be many, but several appear more probable. Risk management was not the paramount objective in the Primrose Project and the volunteers were trusted to respond appropriately. Part of the Primrose Project's philosophy was the creation of communities in which all parties play an equal and meaningful part. This is shown in Jackie's comment when discussing the values in the Primrose CoSAs. She stated that it was the particular nature of the relationship between the volunteers and the core member and the group structure that generates the autonomy:

"I always come away fortified by having seen the very best of human kindness and care ... but it's also amazing what the volunteers will say they get from it, to have participated in helping somebody, I suppose to be to be involved in somebody so intimately, to be involved with a stranger so intimately and I think that doing it in a group it gives you a freedom." (Jackie)

The group nature of the Primrose CoSAs inspired many volunteers to move past the fear and blame felt by many in the management risk and engage with the core member and his problems on a human level.

However, such involvement has not been viewed across all CoSAs as positive. Höing *et al.*, (2015: 19) suggested that such intimacy is also a risk. They felt that this empathy could threaten the impartiality of the volunteers encouraging them to prioritise the needs of the core member above those of the victims and society. They advocated the use of vicarious supervision from the criminal justice system by using experienced co-ordinators (those trained as criminal justice professionals) and outer circle professionals. This would potentially minimize the risk of biased circles and add yet another level of risk management to the process.

The Core Member

One of the biggest areas of discussion for the Primrose CoSAs was the 'risk' of having a disability and how this affected the core member. Risks for the core members were not only the potential of offending or re-offending, but also being involved in something that would result in an official intervention from any number of governmental authorities. Many Primrose volunteers believed that one of the greatest and most enduring risks was the core member's vulnerability and its possible exploitation. For many volunteers, this was not something they had considered at the beginning of the programme, but once they became familiar with the core member and his strengths and susceptibilities, their concept of 'risk' expanded and changed. The Primrose volunteers began to think in terms of not only his risk to others, but the risks to the core member. These 'risks' were often due to uncontrollable external factors or behaviours that he had developed due to previous experiences, such as coping strategies. The Primrose volunteers had initially appreciated that the core members came from deprived and difficult social, economic and family backgrounds, but what was not evident from the outset was how that would manifest itself in a young person with a learning disability. Therefore the volunteers started the project thinking that they may be dealing with a 'paedophile', but found that they were working with a very vulnerable individual and that sexually harmful behaviour was just one of the many issues they encountered. This recognition process

was particularly evident in Circle 1 as the volunteers highlighted in these statements at the end of their circle:

“The fact that he is used by other 14/15 year olds that are more streetwise than he is. Although he pretends to be very much part of the gang, that is his vulnerability, everybody’s using him. For money, [his] home as a base for doing whatever they are doing and, he will always say “yes” because he wants to be part of that family, and that’s his main vulnerable point. But as perpetrator, I never saw him as a perpetrator.”
C1Vol4

“We have become much more aware of just how vulnerable he is and he is a much greater risk to himself than to anybody else.” C1Vol1

This implies that risk factors were amplified by, not only cognitive differences, but also the willingness of others to take advantage of this difference. The acknowledgement that vulnerability and/or learning disability was a problem meant that core member’s difference/disability became an additional ‘risk’. The management of this ‘disability risk’ was much more of a problem for the Primrose volunteers. It was an unrealistic task. This was evidenced by a discussion had by Circle 3 as they reflected whether it was possible to enhance Alex’s ability to critically reflect in particular situations:

“I think we were always aware of a risk of him falling into the wrong social circles as he is quite a vulnerable person ... I don’t think his vulnerability necessarily changed. I think that if he was impressed by somebody’s car or games or watch then he’d be impressed by them and he could be easily led astray.” C3Vol3

It should also be highlighted that it is not the core member’s vulnerability in isolation that was a ‘risk’, but it was the combination of this with its potential exploitation by others. Furthermore, it was unrealistic to expect the volunteers to be able to manage third parties who were willing to take advantage of the core member’s vulnerability. Vulnerabilities that were a result of not only his learning disability, but his social and economic background.

However, despite some of the concerning issues around the concept of risk the CoSA’s risk management component may provide assistance to those with

learning disabilities who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour. It is an undeniable fact that Primrose CoSAs exist in a risk orientated society which 'others' and marginalises groups that are considered 'risky' (Feeley and Simon, 1992).

Therefore to assist in the management of this the CoSA gives the core member affiliation to a group that can help dissect and disseminate risky situations and behaviours. The Primrose CoSAs provided explanations to real life difficult issues. They offered safe, non-professional relationships in which to explore situations. This was acknowledged by Alex who, when asked, what he liked about the circle stated: *"they give me good feedback" (Alex)*.

The volunteers in Circle 3, like several other Primrose circle volunteers, commented on how Alex used the group to assess the responses of the volunteers to particular scenarios. These included getting drunk, talking to girls and watching pornography. They stated that Alex spent much of the circle meeting watching and listening to the volunteers' responses to, not only what he said, but to what was said by others to him. As one of the volunteers suggested:

"I think he is trying to engage with us and learn how to communicate and see people's reactions to what he does" C3Vol3

Some Primrose volunteers felt that this sort of *social modelling* (C3vol4) was beneficial for the core member. He would not only be able to gain clues as to the socially appropriate way to communicate, but could gain insight into why people responded in such way. This would therefore impart a degree of understanding in a natural non-judgmental manner. However, this may not be considered risk management. It was possible that they were adapting their risk management roles, continuing with the 'helping' and 'educating' philosophy. I would argue that simply changing the core member's behaviour in certain situations is not sufficient to truly manage the risk. Such changes would not stop the abusive actions of others, or nullify the core member's cognitive abilities or social conditions. Real risk management would require changes not only to the core members' behaviour, but ongoing and specialist support from a society which accommodated rather than exploited their disabilities.

An illustration of this was the incident in Circle 2 where Tad was being verbally bullied by a boy and girl in his class. The volunteers recognised that Tad had a recurring problem with bullying, which included taunts about his speech (English

was not his first language), his appearance and his learning disability. They also appreciated that this situation could induce anger which could lead to aggressive sexual thoughts and possibly sexually harmful behaviour. However, they worked with him to resolve this problem constructively and without violent confrontation. The volunteers appreciated that this problem was not merely about controlling the core member's potentially sexually harmful behaviour, but also about helping him to manage a recurring life problem. Until that point, the core member had suggested that bullying was something he was going to have to continually endure, that there was no way of stopping it. He was convinced that it would be a habitual theme throughout his life (Circle 2 case file).

This example could be viewed as an incident where the volunteers succeeded in managing a potential risk of harmful behaviour. They had built a strong relationship in which Tad was able to discuss this issues rather than resorting to previously established 'risky' coping methods. They managed to empower the core member to not only resolve a trigger situation, but equipped him to do so in a socially 'acceptable' manner. The communication was not merely with the volunteers, but through their encouragement and coaching extended to his teachers. This communication was no small achievement due to Tad's limited language capabilities.

In this instance all parties (Tad, the volunteers, the co-ordinator and Tad's school) worked together to find an achievable solution. It was not merely a 'risky' situation referred to the co-ordinator, but one in which the community around the core member responded in a supportive manner. However, it should be noted that in this situation the core member could also be viewed as a victim rather than a potential perpetrator.

Conclusion

The CoSA model fits within the risk and risk management paradigm. The CoSA's processes and tools are used to fulfil its risk management goal of 'no more victims'. However, the Primrose CoSAs struggled with the concept of risk. The Primrose volunteers and core members found they had to negotiate the adverse labels produced by being involved in a model for high risk sex

offenders. This labelling had the potential of damaging self-esteem and created ripples of stigma felt by all those involved in the Primrose Project.

Risk management meant that the Primrose volunteers applied 'risk' in an understandable, but biased manner due to their own moral and social concepts. This was often meant that both the Primrose volunteers and core members struggled with what was a 'risk' which produced friction and confusion. This resulted in risk management strategies that were unrealistic and unfair for the core member as the volunteers applied cautionary perspectives.

However, there were mitigating elements within the Primrose Project. The volunteers suggested that the core member's behaviour needed to be viewed differently due to his learning disabilities. It was not "*morally wrong*" or "*an affront to society*" (C2Vol3) and therefore the volunteers did not view the core member's behaviours in the same manner as "*paedophiles*" (C1Vol3). They acknowledged the core member's behaviour may have been harmful and he may be at risk of continuing such behaviour. However, his limited intellectual capacity meant that the response should be supportive rather than punitive. Therefore the volunteers allowed their risk management responsibilities to be driven by support rather than accountability.

The DRR, when used with the Primrose core members was used not as a risk management tool, but as a tool which recognised core member's achievements and celebrated any improvements. By refocusing the DRR, they were able to not merely highlight areas of concern, but acknowledge what had been accomplished. This adaptation had the potential of not only highlighting the gains made by the core member, but could be a tool that supported the volunteers. The DRR became something that recognised and marked both volunteer and core member success, thereby possibly protecting against volunteer emotional 'burnout'.

A further mitigating element of the Primrose CoSAs was the volunteers' autonomy. The volunteers were allowed and utilised a degree of freedom in how they managed their CoSA. They used this freedom by factoring in their understanding of the core member when considering risk factors. This autonomy enabled all the parties involved in administering the Primrose CoSA, both the volunteers and co-ordinators, to relax the strict managerial

requirements of the model. However, this appeared to be a fluid state. Relaxing their risk management stance when the risks appeared to be low, but when a problem or difficult situation arose reverted back to a more managerial position.

The recognition that the core member's disability was one of the Primrose CoSAs greatest risks was in itself an adaptation of the traditional CoSA model. It fostered the feeling of protection in the Primrose volunteers (potentially not present in traditional CoSAs), further justifying both the helping and educating stance adopted by the Primrose CoSAs. However, recognition of this fact must raise questions about whether the core member could ever fully take responsibility for his own risks. This is because not only is the concept of risk management complicated and arbitrary, but the core member is unlikely to be able to control the actions of others who are willing to exploit his vulnerabilities. As with Joe, there will be instances when he could be drawn into situations when all he is guilty of is walking down the street with those he thought were friends. Therefore does this mean that this managerial process, the CoSA or some other similar mechanism, could be an ever present part of the core members' life? If so, should it be linked to a preventative criminal justice solution just because his disability makes him vulnerable and exploitable? Again I would suggest that if such a programme was necessary it should sit within a community driven social welfare solution in which exclusion, isolation or segregation are not fundamental tools.

The next chapter concludes this study with a discussion of the findings detailed in this and the previous two chapters. These findings will be applied not only to the research questions but also future policies, considering the theoretical, political, economic and social implications of such policies.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

Introduction

Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) were established in Canada in 1994. This was in response to a community need to support and monitor a newly released sex offender after his release from prison. The CoSA achieved this objective by creating a circle of community representatives who met with the ex-offender to promote his non-offending and reintegration. The model gained credibility and spread throughout Canada, UK, USA and is now an established model in many parts of the world. The CoSA model was piloted in the UK in 2002 and Circles UK (a non-secular charitable organisation) was established in 2007 to support and develop the British CoSA model.

This thesis explored the use of the UK CoSA model with a group of young/adolescent males who have learning disabilities and have exhibited sexually harmful behaviour. To facilitate such an examination four CoSA case studies were established over an approximate three year period (January, 2013 – December, 2015) (the Primrose Project). These case studies explored the experiences of the Primrose volunteers, management team, co-ordinators and four core members. A qualitative approach was taken to thematically explore data collected from focus groups, interviews, case files and observational material. This data was considered in conjunction with existing multi-disciplinary literature on CoSAs, risk management, restorative justice and rehabilitation, focusing in detail on the recent UK CoSA studies. To further examine how the CoSA model was employed in the Primrose Project the following research questions were used:

How has the CoSA model been adapted to work with a group of young people who pose a risk of exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour and have a learning disability?

How does a CoSA for young people with learning disabilities who pose a risk of exhibiting sexually harmful behaviour respond to the concepts of support and accountability? How are the tensions between these concepts managed?

How does this type of CoSA, one for young people with learning disabilities who have exhibited sexually harmful behaviour, fit within the risk management paradigm?

This chapter will explore these questions and how they relate to the arguments conceptualised through the themes of support, accountability and risk as described throughout this thesis. Finally the chapter will conclude with an examination of these findings with reference to practice, policy and theory, concluding with suggestions for future research.

Adaptations of the CoSA Model for Young People with Learning Disabilities

Those who worked with the Primrose core members (co-ordinators and volunteers) felt that support had been the primary role of their circle. This was different to other UK CoSA studies in which accountability took priority (Thomas *et al.*, 2014). This adaptation in perceived priorities was fundamental for the Primrose Project. Support facilitated the development of relationships within the Primrose CoSAs and promoted the trust required to encourage responsive and effective communication. This trust was not instant, but developed gradually and was frequently inspired by specific events requiring support. The support offered by the Primrose volunteers took the form of both emotional and practical support. However, it appeared to be the relational platform from which help was offered which elevated the importance of the support. This assistance was a result of a social rather than professional relationship, one that had been painstakingly nurtured over a period of time. Their relationship was cemented by a willingness on the part of the Primrose volunteers to spend time with the core member, thereby implying a degree of respect and genuine human interest in the core member's wellbeing. This was an unusual and welcome experience for the core members who appreciated and responded to the novelty of just being listened to. It was the unique social nature of the supportive relationship which was beneficial. It provided something that was missing from the Primrose core members' existing relationships and a link into a social community. The importance of a social rather than professional relationship had added significance for the core members within the Primrose Project, not merely

because of their social isolation, but also due to their previous numerous and often undermining interactions with professionals.

All the Primrose CoSAs developed into a form of social network which allowed the volunteers to extend their social capital to the core member and whilst this may not have always fostered a real 'friendship', it mitigated some of the core members' isolation issues. This enabled the core members to develop certain socialisation skills, particularly in the area of communication, and facilitated the development of various life skills. Therefore I would argue that there are definite benefits to pursuing a CoSA model in which support is a central component. However, the support extended by the Primrose volunteers was of a limited nature and, despite their varied and extensive knowledge, experience and backgrounds, the volunteers could not assist with many of their core members' most fundamental difficulties. Many of the issues encountered by the Primrose core members were similar to those experienced in traditional CoSAs, such as practical problems with employment, housing and benefits (Northcutt Bohmert, *et al.*, 2016). However, these issues were amplified and far more complicated due to the core member's age, learning disability and socio-economic backgrounds and the social support of a small group of well-meaning individuals did little to resolve such problems. To address these social structural issues, I would argue that a CoSA established, managed and funded within a social care rather than criminal justice environment would enable greater access to appropriate resources and expertise. This will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Not only was the perception of support prioritisation an adaptation in the Primrose CoSAs, the support offered had to be modified. It had to respond to the core member's intellectual capabilities. This often meant that support appeared to the volunteers to be small and inconsequential and not related to the bigger picture of preventing reoffending. These support activities also had to be delivered in a slow and repetitive manner. Relationships took a long time to develop and required a degree of patience and commitment from the Primrose volunteers. This made the whole process more protracted than a traditional circle, therefore the length of a Primrose CoSA lifecycle was extended to reflect this. This in turn required considerable volunteer commitment and understanding. Volunteer expectations of the core member and what the circle

could achieve had to be managed and adapted to recognise the core member's diverse capabilities. The volunteers had to be educated both formally and informally to appreciate small and gradual changes. This was particularly evident when exploring situations that were unfamiliar to the core member. This challenged the volunteers' own internal constructions and they had to adjust their expectations and re-evaluate their understanding of what their core member was capable of engaging with.

The Primrose CoSAs were also adapted to include a greater number of third parties. As with other studies, there was recognition of the importance of the family in supporting the core member throughout the CoSA process and their continued support after the circle finished (Porteous *et al.*, 2015). This meant greater inclusion and consideration of family members at the beginning and throughout the lifecycle of the circle. A further personnel adaptation for the Primrose CoSAs was the extension of those included in the outer circle who could be classed as 'stakeholders' (see Appendix 1). This included not only those third parties with a criminal justice remit, but also key workers, social workers, therapists and teachers. Nurturing these relationships not only ensured greater support and communication throughout the lifecycle of the CoSA, but also theoretically provided a safer and more structured 'hand-over' at the end of the CoSA process. As with the other adaptations, these changes meant the Primrose CoSAs took longer to establish and progress and required considerable specialist management making them protracted, labour intensive and potentially more expensive than traditional CoSAs.

Management of the Tensions between Support and Accountability

The management of support and accountability and the tensions between the two concepts was a challenging issue for the Primrose Project. This was particularly evident at the beginning of the programme as the volunteers, having initially labelled the core member a 'sex offender', struggled with the stereotypes associated with this label (Brown, 2005; Höing *et al.* 2016a; Matravers, 2003; McCartan *et al.*, 2015). This caused an initial tension between the constructs associated with 'sex offenders', which appeared to condone a challenging and confrontational use of accountability and the volunteers'

supportive roles. The tension between the confrontational nature of accountability and the relational requirement of support was a constant factor within my study. Accountability at times frustrated the social relationships within the circles as the Primrose volunteers initially tried to retain a degree of distance in order to administer this concept. Some viewed the core member as a potential risk which inhibited the trust required to truly engage. Therefore core member choices and decisions were sometimes questioned and scrutinized by the volunteers from an accountability perspective overshadowing the supportive element of the model. However, as the relationship between the Primrose volunteers and their core member matured, the volunteers began to see the core member as a vulnerable individual in need of their support, rather than as a set of 'risks'. Therefore the confrontational element implicit in accountability was mitigated by the volunteer's willingness to adjust their perceptions of sexually harmful behaviour due to the core member's learning disabilities and the natural development of a relationship. Such was the recognition of the core members' vulnerabilities that if the pursuit of accountability was considered overly distressing or risked jeopardising their relationship, the volunteers chose to either defer the issue or found other less confrontational ways of tackling it. This elevation of support and the focus on core members' needs was often justified by the volunteers as they felt their supportive relationships enabled them to better manage their accountability obligations.

This study highlights that the tension between support and accountability is likely to be even greater in a CoSA for young people with learning disabilities. This was evident throughout my study as the core members struggled to cope cognitively and emotionally with the confrontational and confession aspects of accountability. This difficulty was recognised at the outset by the Primrose management team who adapted their disclosure process to mitigate anticipated, negative, emotional problems. However, anticipated feelings of guilt and shame could not be avoided as the CoSA process was built on ongoing core member questioning and risk acknowledgement. Several of the Primrose CoSAs struggled with accountability, not only because of the inherent tensions between this concept and support, but because of their core member's cognitive impairments and his previous life experiences. This finding reflected concerns suggested by both Daly (2008) and Morris (2001) when writing about employing

restorative theories with vulnerable groups who were likely to negatively internalise such concepts. Accountability required the core member to engage in a degree of reflection in order to understand that certain behaviour was prohibited, why it was prohibited and the wider repercussions of this behaviour. Accountability appeared to require a degree of emotional understanding and language skills, which the Primrose core members lacked, to internalise and express comprehension and contrition in a constructive manner (Ward and Durrant, 2013). These difficulties are common issues recognised in other studies with respect to young people with learning disabilities who exhibit sexually harmful behaviour (Vizard, 2014).

The Primrose volunteers recognised that using accountability with reference only to the risk of re-offending, without consideration of the individual's age, abilities, life and social experiences, would result in alienation and not facilitate a functioning relationship. In response to their recognition that the accountability process should be used sensitively and sparingly, and only within a trusting and secure relationship, the Primrose volunteers adjusted their use of this concept. They subtly adapted its role making it educative rather than accusatorial. They tried to 'help' rather than 'make' the core member understand, ensuring accountability was a supportive device and thereby giving precedence to their supportive role. This was facilitated and acknowledged by the Primrose management team who referred to their therapeutic professional understanding of those with learning disabilities.

This view of supportive accountability was promoted within the Primrose CoSAs, but this may not be necessarily the same for models with closer connections to the criminal justice system. These connections may be in the form of strong links to the probation service (Banks *et al.*, 2015), the continuing need for referrals from the criminal justice system, or the receipt of funding from the Ministry of Justice (Circles UK, 2016). In these models there are likely to be stronger links to managerial requirements at the expense of the relational benefits. As suggested by Hucklesby and Wincup (2014: 378) such models will inevitably "mimic managerialist criminal justice practices". This is likely to be particularly evident in respect to the concept of accountability where there appears to be a degree of definitional flexibility and a predisposition to exercise caution. Previous UK CoSA studies have indicated that there is frequently no

shared understanding of accountability even between parties involved (volunteers, core members and stakeholders) (Thomas *et al.*, 2014; McCartan, 2016). McCartan (2016: 51) suggested that this was a significant issue as, unlike the Canadian model which focuses on support, the UK model has to balance support and accountability. This is because the model is an integrated part of the criminal justice system that parallels statutory practices.

I would therefore argue that in addition to establishing a consensus on what is meant by accountability, consideration as to the contribution accountability makes to the CoSA model should be reconsidered. The above tensions and ambiguities must call into question the effectiveness of accountability, especially for groups who find the concept difficult to understand and process. This is also potentially true for other models and theories that use accountability. Arguably, accountability is a political device exploited in the CoSA model to promote its use (Hannem, 2013). However, when used in a non-supportive manner due to process driven requirements or social constructions, it is likely to be counterproductive creating problems with relationship building, stigma and guilt. This makes it not only counterproductive in the development of a trusting supportive relationship, but an additional punishment (Mann and Barnett, 2012). Furthermore, it is potentially another form of social control which, whilst packaged as humane and benevolent, can be harmful and stigmatizing (Case and Haines, 2015; Cohen, 1985; Griffin 2005). This may be politically justified when applying it to high risk adult sex offenders, but it should be strongly challenged as the model begins to emerge as a form of prevention and/or diversion and used with vulnerable individuals. This is particularly pertinent in a climate of austerity when other supportive ventures are being eroded and the CoSA, due to its apparent hard line accountability philosophy, remains politically and socially supported (O'Malley, 2001 and 2004).

My study not only has implications for the use of accountability within CoSA programmes, but must question its use in other restorative programmes, particularly those with vulnerable groups. This study adds further weight to the suggestion that restorative justice programmes need to be administered with a degree of sensitivity. Such programmes should not be viewed as automatically transferable or suitable for everyone (Gray, 2005). Consideration should be given to the individual's background and abilities. For some individuals

navigating the emotions induced by accountability or reintegrative shaming can be extremely difficult. This could be due to their pre-existing understanding of themselves and where they fit into society. It is therefore possible that those with learning disabilities who will have experienced both rejection and victimisation are more likely to respond adversely to such programmes (Mishna, 2003). They may consider themselves already 'faulty/wrong/bad' due to their disability and therefore any additional guilt applied due to shaming or accountability may amplify existing feelings of shame. Therefore, particular groups need additional support, individualised attention and programme variation, otherwise there is the potential to exacerbate shame and guilt and contribute to problems of "vulnerability, trauma and self-harm" (Osterman and Masson, 2016: 7), all of which have the possibility of being counterproductive and inducing further harm. As with Osterman and Masson's (2016) study of women involved in restorative conferences, it could be concluded that participation in such programmes requires careful consideration. They suggest that the individual's complex needs and abilities need to be assessed and supportive relationships established. They recommend that these relationships need to be developed prior to any conference and continue after the programme has finished. If this is achieved Osterman and Masson (2016) suggest that such programmes could provide often isolated individuals with greater opportunities of engaging with other support provisions. This could again be applied to those with learning disabilities, but I would make the same point as I do throughout this thesis, which is if this is a social support issue it should be addressed outside of the criminal justice system.

Furthermore, if accountability in a restorative justice intervention is about taking responsibility, there needs to be an acknowledgement of the external causes of the offending. Therefore to be truly restorative, consideration should be given to issues which promoted the offending such as marginalisation, discrimination and exploitation.

CoSAs for Young People with Learning Disabilities and the Risk Paradigm

It can be argued that the Primrose CoSAs, despite their core member's age, learning disabilities and lack of criminal convictions, fit within the risk

management paradigm. The Primrose CoSAs had the objective of 'no more victims' and have monitoring and reporting functions. However, it was acknowledged by those within the Primrose Project that general risk factors, particularly those specifically attributed to sexually harmful behaviour, could not be applied in the same way to those with learning disabilities. It was further recognised that it was unrealistic to believe that those with such complicated backgrounds and cognitive differences would be able to fit within generic risk criteria.

Offender risk management approaches frequently have a negative influence on intervention programmes. They promote caution and ensure that actions taken are "defensive" (Matravers, 2003: 3; Porteous, 2007). This was reflected in this study and meant that at times the Primrose volunteers were guarded in how they acted with and responded to their core member. The risk concerns embodied in their accountability responsibility meant at times they were fearful at the expense of being supportive. The group nature of the model and the support of the Primrose management team and co-ordinator helped to mitigate certain feelings of apprehension. However, this mitigation was not sufficient to prevent the volunteers repeatedly questioning the core member, other volunteers, and themselves, to ensure they made 'defensible' decisions.

The potential risk issues managed in this study frequently demonstrated that risk was a matter of construction and that these constructions changed throughout the circle. At the beginning of the Primrose Project, the volunteers viewed certain issues and situations as high risk, but as they became familiar with their core member and his circumstances this impression changed. However, there were points within the circle where risks appeared to spike leading the volunteers to question values and impressions they had established, reverting back to a previously risk averse position. It was also apparent that risk had moral and social constructs and that these were different for each of the CoSA participants (Hannah-Moffat, 2005; O'Malley, 2004). As with other studies, the volunteers discovered that issues could be both a potential risk and a positive event, and that the core member could be both "a risk and at risk" (Porteous, 2007: 260). This made the management of risks a complicated and arbitrary task which was often approached in a cautionary manner without the core member really understanding the nature of the risk. This frequently left the

Primrose volunteers struggling with the dilemma of what advice to give to their core member and what was the best course of action for someone with such limited options. I would argue that this raises questions about the core member's ability to navigate such a complicated moral laden concept, with or without support. His/her decision making process, due to both his/her disability and life experience, is likely to be very different to that of the volunteers and unless sensitively managed is liable to cause tensions within a risk management framework.

The belief in the possibility of preventing future sexually harmful behaviour was cited by many Primrose volunteers as a reason for becoming a Primrose volunteer. They were drawn to the model because they hoped that with sufficient support and guidance the core member would be prevented from engaging in future sexually harmful behaviour. This would mean that the core member, with support and instruction, could avoid conviction, prison and sex offender notification. Furthermore, the Primrose volunteers also suggested that there were probably good reasons why the core member should be supported and not punished for his actions. Therefore, the preventative concept of the CoSA would both aid the vulnerable core member and protect other potential victims. Whilst this view of the possible preventative outcomes of a CoSA may be an understandable volunteer motivator, extending the CoSA to specific groups has the potential of broadening those considered 'sex offenders'. CoSAs are programmes set within the criminal justice system to work with high/medium risk sex offenders. In the case of the Primrose Project, this extends the 'dangerous' or 'risky' label to young people with learning disabilities. Inclusion in such a programme could mean that the core member's vulnerabilities, the reasons why he/she should be treated differently, is subsumed by the label attached to the CoSA. This was evident at the beginning of the CoSA project when many of the volunteers believed they would be working with 'sex offenders'. Therefore rather than highlighting the need to work sensitively with these groups and possibly uncover the real risks, such labels categorise and sort individuals into those to be managed rather than helped.

This potentially means that individual factors, such as learning disabilities and adolescence, become synonymous with risk and social factors that contribute to

the harmful behaviour and are circumvented (Feeley and Simon, 1992). This was seen on numerous occasions in the Primrose CoSAs with the acknowledgement that one of the greatest risks was not the core member's sexually harmful behaviour, but the response of others to their vulnerabilities. It was universally acknowledged by the Primrose volunteers that certain third parties would take advantage of the core member's age and/or learning disability. For the Primrose core members the real risk was the exploitation of their vulnerability and not possible future sexually harmful behaviour. This would suggest that by focusing on the imagined consequences of the core member's behaviour (future sexually harmful behaviour) the CoSA provides an illusion of ongoing risk management, but does little to address the real problems (McNeill, 2009). This conclusion challenges one of the central premises of the CoSA model which suggests that the core member, with assistance, will reach a degree of clarity and thereby able to manage his/her own risks (Circles, UK, 2015; Hannem, 2013). Such a statement implies that the solution to the ongoing risk resides totally with the core member. However, I would argue that whilst he/she may become more aware of certain risks, effective risk management relies heavily on external and contextual influences which is something the core member has little or no chance of influencing. Furthermore this lack of influence or the ability to instigate change is potentially even more of a reality for an individual with a learning disability.

It was also recognised within the Primrose Project that a preventative model makes reintegration redundant as most of the core members had never officially been excluded from society by serving a prison sentence. Rather than reintegration, the bigger social issue of 'integration' was highlighted within the Primrose Project. A circle is a temporary, finite and voluntary programme with limited powers to change external issues (Clarke, 2015; Northcutt Bohmert, *et al.*, 2016). The Primrose volunteers helped with issues such as socialisation and communication, provided a social network and limited social capital, but were unable to supply the fundamental opportunities essential to support basic social integration (Kirkwood and McNeill, 2015). They were unable to facilitate a continuing social framework which would enable greater community inclusion and participation. So whilst, through the support arm of the CoSA model, the core member may develop greater confidence and socialization skills, he/she

may still lack the opportunities to utilise them in their normal social environment. He/she will be returned to the same situation without recourse to greater prospects (Carlen, 2012). Consequently, I would argue that the Primrose CoSAs, despite the high hopes of all those involved with the project provided limited and finite benefits and implied an obligation (risk management) which the core members found difficult to understand and address. Whilst this was undertaken with the core members best interests in mind, this was not reintegration as the programme did not have the economic or political mandate to do anything other than manage 'risks'.

The risk management part of this programme did little to prevent re-offending, but caused considerable tensions within the model. It would appear that risk rather than being a scientific certainty was a fluid subjective, concept (Case and Haines, 2009). Furthermore, unless the background and personality of the risk subject was fully understood, any risk evaluation was flawed. Those with learning disabilities have such diverse and complicated backgrounds and cognitive variations that any generalised risk predictions would have a limited accuracy. This was evidenced in the use of the bespoke circle risk assessment tool (Dynamic Risk Review (DRR)) which was disregarded as a risk management tool by the Primrose management team. Many of the questions could not be answered by the volunteers as discussions about sexual thoughts and feelings were frequently beyond the limited understanding and linguistic skills of the core member. The questions that related to the emotional condition of the core member, such as feelings of isolation and powerlessness, were often answered in the affirmative. However, this was a reality for someone who had the core member's social, economic, family backgrounds in addition to a demonstrable learning disability.

The central findings of this research would point to a CoSA model for young people with learning disabilities which is grounded in social support rather than accountability or risk management. Both accountability and risk management appear to create a model which is punitive and labelling and does little to help this group address the problems which contribute to the sexually harmful behaviour. To assist these young people, it was critical to appreciate their complex social and personal needs, which were incompatible with standard risk management protocols. The motives behind actions cannot be captured neatly

in a set of standards as they are often a combination of complex intellectual and social strategies, adopted due to the core members' differences and the response of others to these differences. For this group, risk assessment does not mean copious amounts of data synthesised down into easily applied criteria, it means another set of standards that they are unlikely to fit into therefore making them further marginalised.

This finding does have implications in the use of risk assessments, particularly for those who have complex and diverse backgrounds, needs and abilities. As suggested in Chapter 3 on the parties, risk assessments have been used with those with learning disabilities. However, they are complex and expensive and need to be undertaken by specialists if they are to have any real meaning (Vizard, 2014). I would go further than this and argue that such assessments should be used sparingly and that they should not be substituted for extensive personal interaction. My study would imply that working predominately with risk assessments detaches the assessor from the individual under assessment. I would argue without human connection such assessments do not create scientifically accurate evaluations as suggested in some of the literature detailed in Chapter 2. Only through spending time with the core members did the volunteers begin to understand their needs and risks and such understanding would not have been achieved or enhanced by applying a prescriptive set of risk assessment criteria.

The Expanding Model

The expansion of the CoSA model could be painted as a positive and altruistic move, but as I have highlighted there are numerous adverse implications with such an expansion. This model has the potential of drawing certain ill equipped groups into a widening criminal justice net (Cohen, 1985). By concentrating purely on the management of the core member, the model further obscures the problems of and consequences for certain socially marginalised, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. As pointed out by Porteous (2007: 217) offending risks are connected to "just about every measure of socioeconomic disadvantage one can think of". It has the potential of just masking the fact that there are scarce appropriate non-criminal justice interventions (Fyson, 2007). It also

means that problems for certain socially vulnerable and disadvantaged sections of the community are diverted into a criminal justice model under the guise of public protection rather than being addressed as a social welfare issues (Williams and Nash, 2014).

These criticisms could possibly be countered by highlighting the public health advantages to such a model (McCartan *et al.*, 2015). However, such approaches are also “risk infused” relying on surveillance, monitoring and the individual to make the ‘appropriate’ decision and seek treatment to reduce his/her risk (Kemshall and Wood, 2007: 216). Much of the discussion in this thesis has argued that a CoSA for young people with learning disabilities (or for that matter other vulnerable groups) should be distanced from the criminal justice system and included in some form of social care programme. This can be supported by the fact that young people rarely continue offending once they receive the right help and support (Caldwell, 2010; Hackett *et al.*, 2005) and that the criminal justice system is ill equipped to deal with the needs of those with learning disabilities (or other vulnerable groups) (Jones, 2007; Vizard, 2014). This would mean that service providers could have the freedom to move away from purely managerial responses driven by values and discourses of criminal justice philosophies. Therefore, if deemed appropriate after establishing a relationship with the core member, a CoSA could be a predominantly support response. Social care policies, such as the Transforming Care programme, may prompt volunteer solutions for managing community risks providing a stepping stone to opening up this debate (NHS, 2015). This challenge to the CoSAs links to the criminal justice system should also raise questions about the managerial role of Circles UK with its traditional connections to the Ministry of Justice. However, pursuing a CoSA through social care or other welfare or voluntary (non-criminal justice affiliated) agencies may not promote a change in priorities. There is the potential for them to be drawn into “soft end policing” creating policies which are no longer driven by traditional social care criteria but are aligned to criminal justice strategies (Rodgers, 2008, 2012: 415). However, I would argue that whilst this may be true, ‘therapeutic’ CoSAs or CoSAs with social/welfare objectives stand a greater chance of success outside the criminal justice system.

At the time of writing this thesis, most core members entering CoSAs will have been referred via the probation service. The probation service in the UK has gone through considerable change. The impact of such changes, with the amalgamation of commercial, prison and probation organisations in the HM Prisons and Probation Service (HMPPS) and their diverse professional and commercial drivers has yet to be seen. The influence of commercial organisations within this group could mean CoSAs for those with learning disabilities would be viewed as financially prohibitive. This would make them either very rare or managed in such a way which fitted a payment criteria and not the needs of the core members, where payment focuses upon a tick in the box and not the quality of such a service. This issue has been highlighted with other criminal justice interventions (Pitts, 2007). Alternatively, the newly created HMPPS may have a strong prison service influence making containment and monitoring rather than support and reintegration policy priorities. Neither of which would promote bespoke and potentially expensive support driven adaptations to the model.

Research Limitations

This is a small study containing only four case studies. This was due to the fact that there were only four Primrose Project CoSAs. This was an exploratory study to examine how those involved in the Primrose Project responded to the experience. The study was not intended to produce generalisable findings relating to the CoSA model, but to highlight issues that arose in Primrose Project in connection with its application to those with learning disabilities.

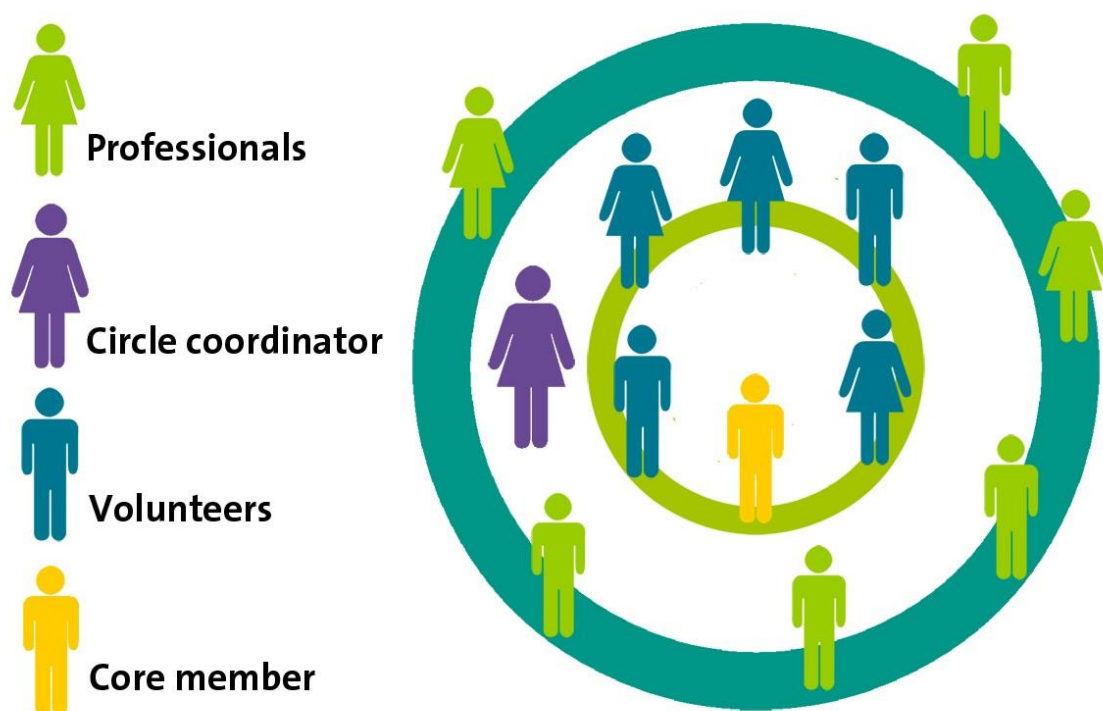
Regrettably, only one Primrose core member agreed to be interviewed for this study which meant there was limited input from the service users. This was a result of ethical constraints and the core member's willingness to take a direct part in the study. However, I was able to access case files which gave greater strength to their voice without producing unwarranted anxiety.

Future Research

Continuing research within this area is important, particularly as the model continues to grow and expand to include other vulnerable groups. It may not be possible to produce either control studies or matched trials as such a research programme would be very difficult to establish. Ethical considerations, the diversity of the individuals and the sparsity of the group in general may limit any further programmes. However, it is important to recognise the needs of such groups. For further research, a greater involvement of the core member would be beneficial, but considerable preparation and investigation as to the most sensitive methods of consultation should be carried out prior to any study.

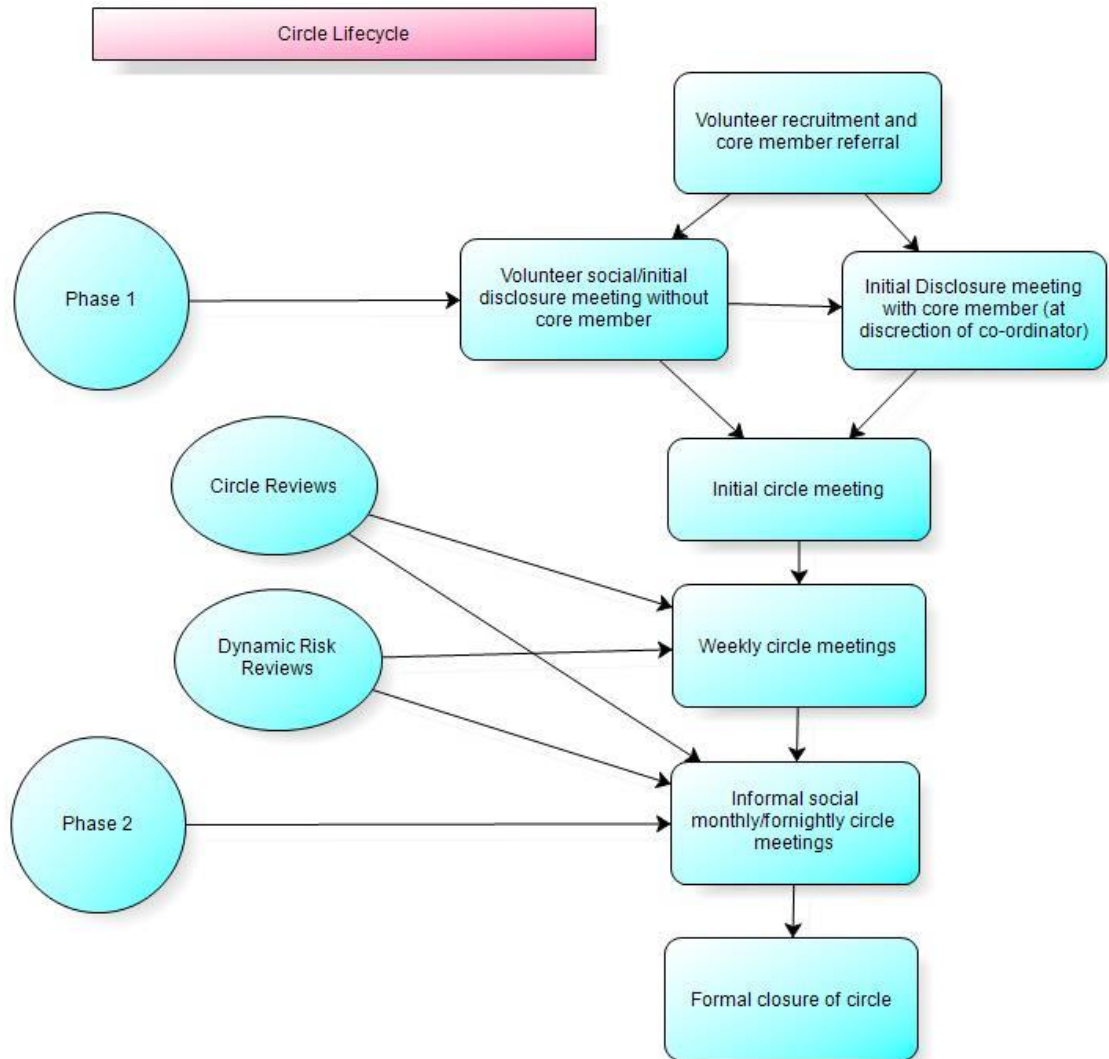
Much of the existing CoSA research appears to be very positive about the model. The CoSA model does seek to challenge the constructs of sexually harmful behaviour by community involvement and education. However, the model also has the potential of extending the groups of individuals that need to be managed. Without further research and challenges to the concept of group managerialism, the growing perception that this is the only course of action for certain issues and particular groups will remain uncontested. As stated by Feeley and Simon (1992: 470) such managerialism does not seek to address any problem, but creates “a kind of waste management function.” Therefore there must be searching consideration as to whether the CoSA model, without adaptation, is an appropriate method of working with vulnerable groups, especially those who lack the social capital to voice their concerns.

Appendix 1
Circle Diagram

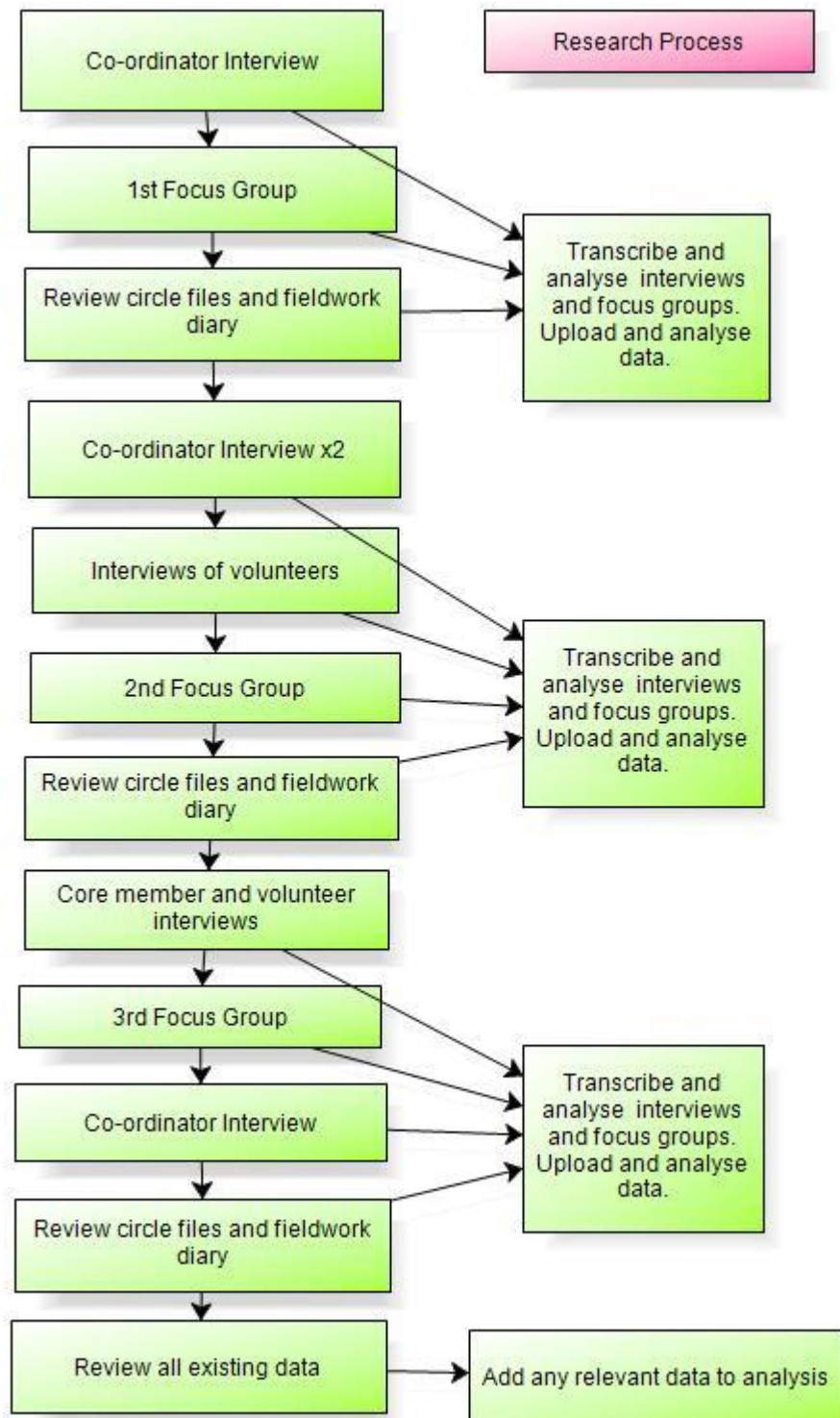


Appendix 2 – Circle Lifecycle and Research Process

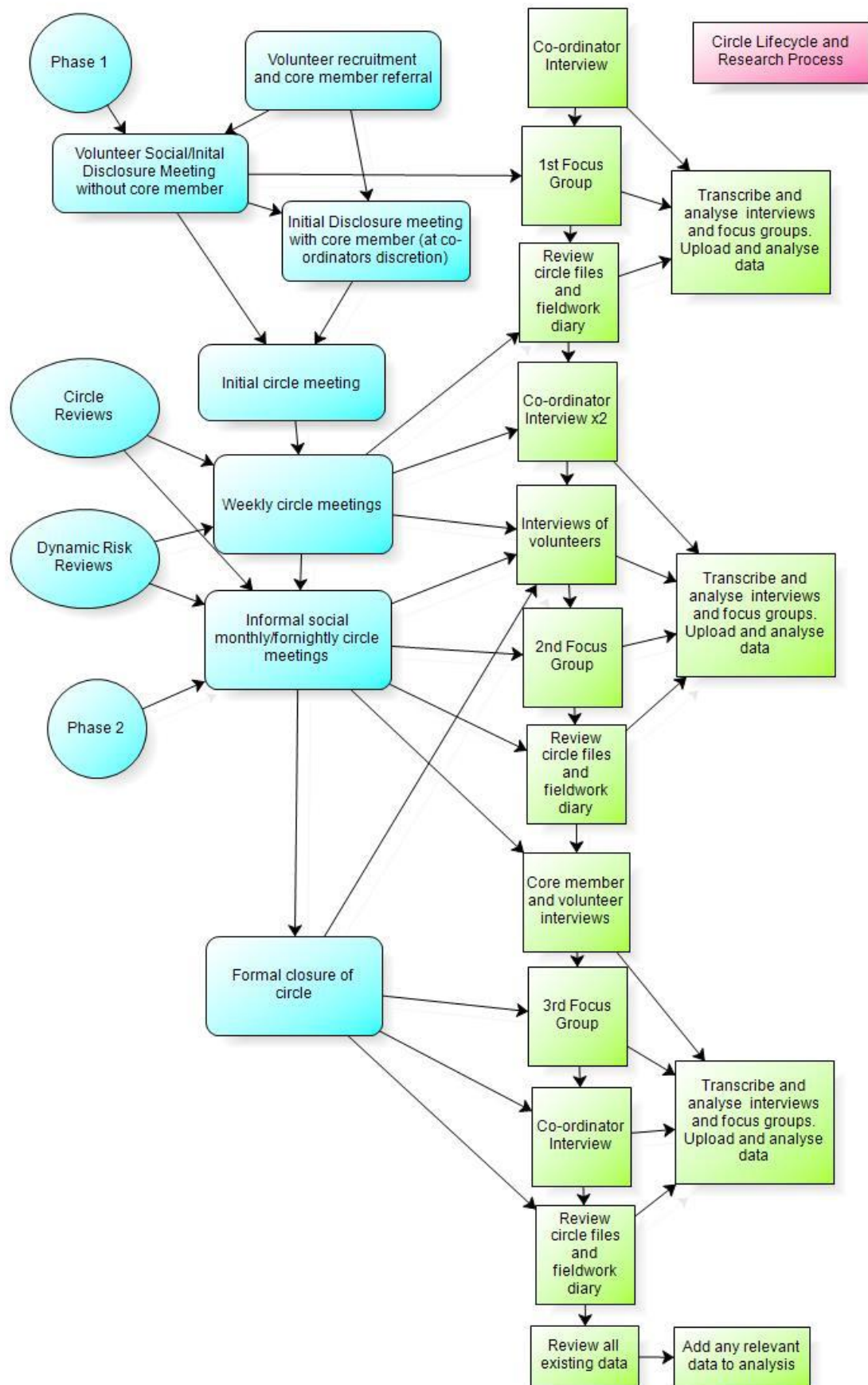
Circle Lifecycle



Research Process



Circle Lifecycle and Research Process



Circles of Support and Accountability

Core Member Referral Form

To enable us to assess the suitability of the proposed Core Member for a Circle of Support and Accountability, and select appropriate volunteers please complete this referral form as fully as possible and return together with any relevant documentation.

Circles of Support and Accountability

Core Member Referral Form

Name of proposed Core Member

Name	
Date of Birth	
Current address	
Name of referrer	
Name, address, tel. no., fax no., e-mail address of referring agency	
Name and phone number of key worker	
Name and address and phone number of GP	
Is the Core Member on any orders?	Remand/ Licence/CRO /other (please specify)
Date and details licence	
Commencement/end of Order etc.	
Why do you think the proposed Core Member would benefit from a Circle?	
Have you discussed a Circle with the Core Member and what their views are?	

Brief information on sexually harmful behaviour or current risk factors, including any formal sentences.	
Has the Core Member been formally assessed for risk? If yes, then please give details.	
Sex Offender Registration	Yes No
Subject to MAPPA	Yes No Level
SOPO	Yes No
CRO Conditions	
Licence Conditions	
SOPO Conditions	
Has Core Member completed therapy and/or a treatment programme?	Yes/No
If Yes please specify	
Does Core Member have a history of, or present a current risk of harm to staff/volunteers?	Yes / No
If Yes please give details	

Details of any family and significant relationships	
List of professionals involved with core member	
Significant health issues	
Any special needs we should consider in the assessment process:	
Does the Core Member have a Statement of Special Needs?	
Address of Social Services Department (if involved):	
Name of Social Worker:	
Telephone number:	
Nature of involvement	

Reports and Other Documentation Attached:-

(please tick appropriate box/es)

- ☐ Pre Sentence Report
- ☐ Psychologists Report
- ☐ Psychiatric Report
- ☐ MAPPA Report
- ☐ Depositions relating to the most recent offence
- ☐ Details of Criminal Record
- ☐ OASys
- ☐ Other relevant documentation

RETURN TO:

Appendix 4 – Sample Circle Agreement

Circle Agreement Example

This is an agreement between the Core Member who has stated a commitment to reintegrate into the community without reoffending, and with representatives of that community who have formed a Circle of Support and Accountability around the Core Member to assist with that aim.

All Circle members agree to:

- Commit themselves to maintaining the safety of the community
- Be honest with other Circle members
- Abide by the consensus of the Circle in matters relating to group decisions
- Respect confidentiality of personal information shared by other Circle members, unless community safety is compromised by withholding that information
- Consult with the Circle before talking with community members outside the Circle (e.g. Police or Probation) about the Circle or any member of it
- Accept responsibility for convening an emergency meeting if the Core Member's risk of reoffending rises significantly
- Acknowledge the need for certain meetings to be held without the Core Member present, for training, review or evaluation purposes
- To co-operate only with evaluation exercises and processes that are endorsed by [] and Circles UK

The Core Member agrees to:

- Share his/her Relapse Prevention/Better Life plan (where relevant) with the Circle, and to follow it
- Maintain an offence-free life

- Identify any medical or therapeutic needs and commit to dealing with these
- Identify any substance abuse history and follow a plan to address this
- Attend all Circle meetings unless prevented from doing so by circumstances

The Circle volunteers agree to:

- Provide a community of support and accountability for the Core Member
- Assist the Core Member to keep to their Relapse Prevention/Better Life plan
- Assist the Core Member to practice and develop a range of skills as required
- According to need, to assist the Core Member with accommodation, management of finances, management of leisure time, employment, access to medical and other services, and access to social security benefits
- To advocate on behalf of the Core Member with community agencies as required
- To keep minutes of each meeting, along with records of other activities, to share these with the Core Member and to make these records available to the Circle Co-ordinator
- To establish collaborative relationships with statutory authorities whilst maintaining the independence and confidentiality of the Circle
- Attend all Circle meetings so far as possible, and to notify other Circle members beforehand if they cannot

I agree to accept and abide by the above terms of this Agreement in so far as they apply to me:

Signed.....

Core Member

Signed.....

Community Volunteer

Signed.....

Community Volunteer

Signed.....

Community Volunteer

Signed.....

Community Volunteer

Signed.....

Community Volunteer

Date.....

Appendix 5 – Sample Dynamic Risk Review

Core Member Dynamic Risk Review Form

Circle Code	
Date of Review	
Review number	
Frequency of Circle meetings	
Circle Coordinator	

1. Is there evidence that the CM is struggling with problematic sexual thoughts?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

2. Has the CM spoken to an excessive and/or inappropriate degree about sexual matters in general?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

3. Has the CM expressed any sexualised attitudes towards children?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

4. Has the CM expressed hostile or negative views towards women?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

5. Is there evidence that the CM is displaying a high emotional identification with children?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

6. Is there evidence that the CM is experiencing feelings of emotional loneliness?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

7. Is there evidence that the CM is experiencing feelings of inadequacy in relationships?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

8. Does the CM have stable emotional relationships with any other people outside the Circle?

No one	1 person	2 people	3 or more
--------	----------	----------	-----------

Please give brief details:

9. Is there evidence that the CM is experiencing feelings of powerlessness or hopelessness?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

10. Has the CM demonstrated reckless behaviour?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

11. Has the CM expressed any hostile feelings or angry outbursts?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

12. Does the CM demonstrate appropriate problem solving abilities?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

13. Does the CM maintain realistic relapse prevention strategies?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

14. Is there evidence that the CM is experiencing any feelings of low self-esteem?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

15. Does the CM engage in appropriate activities and hobbies?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all						A great deal

Please give brief details:

16. Is the CM in stable and suitable accommodation?

Yes ☐ No ☐

17. Is the CM involved in any paid or voluntary work?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Appendix 6 - Ethics Approval

Middlesex University School Health and Social Sciences Dept. of Criminology and Sociology and Dept. of Social Sciences Ethics sub-Committee

Application for research ethics approval

The purpose of this form is to help staff and students in the Dept. of Criminology and Sociology and Dept. of Social Sciences in their pursuit of ethical research methodologies and procedures.

Please complete the form giving as much detail as possible. If a question is not applicable, please indicate by marking N/A. Students should discuss and complete the form with their supervisors.

For taught undergraduate and masters students, ethics applications are usually dealt with at programme level, though referral to the Dept. of Criminology and Sociology and Dept. of Social Sciences Ethics sub-Committee is a possibility if complex or contentious ethics issues arise.

You must submit with this application:

- a) A summary of the methodology to be used in the research**
- b) Draft of any interview schedule or questionnaire you propose to use or outline of the topics to be covered**
- c) Information sheet/s and/or consent form/s for participants**
- d) Completed risk assessment form**

1. Applicant details – Staff (students please go to section 2)

a) Name of lead researcher / applicant:

b) Middlesex university email address of lead applicant:

c) Names of co-applicants and their affiliation (All staff employed by Middlesex that are involved in the research – staff, consultants, contractors - must be included in the ethics application):

c) Details of any collaborative institutions (name of University or organisation):

d) Who is funding the research?

Study start date:

Estimated end date:

2. Applicant details – students

a) **Student name:** Susan Hillyard

b) **Student number:** M00327081

c) **Name of programme:** MPhil/PhD

d) **Nature of the study (e.g. dissertation, field trip exercise)** Research for PhD

e) **Year of study:** 2013 - 2016

f) **Mode of study:** Full-time

g) **Name(s) of supervisor(s):** Jenni Ward and Karen Duke

All staff and all students must fill out sections 3 – 7 below

3. Details of proposed study:

a) **Title of study:** Is a Circle of Support and Accountability an Effective Model to Support and Manage Young People with Learning Disabilities who Exhibit Sexually Harmful Behaviour?

b) **Please give a brief description of the nature of the study (50-100 words), including details of data collection procedures:**

The study will evaluate whether the process used with existing adult sex offenders within the Circles UK CoSA model is a viable tool to be used with young people with learning disabilities considering the underlying theories of restorative justice, community justice and risk management.

There will be data collection in the form of; interviews, focus groups, documentary evaluation and field observations. This data will come from several groups; [the Primrose Project] and Circles UK and their staff, the adult volunteers engaged in the CoSA and the Core Member of the CoSA. The Core Member will have mild to moderate learning disabilities and some will be under 18 years of age. The focus groups will be completed with the circle volunteers and the interviews will be undertaken with all parties. I will be working with [the Primrose Project] and as such I will be following their company and professional protocols and regulations (see attached documents). [The Primrose Project] is governed by the BACP's codes of ethics and practice. All actions will be risk assessed as part of the company's risk

management procedure. I have attached a copy of [Primrose Project] staff handbook and their health and safety policies.

It is acknowledged that there are ethical issues undertaking interviews with both individuals who have learning difficulties and those under 18. I shall therefore not interview any person under the age of 18 years of age. This will exclude one Core Member from being interviewed. The remaining three are either over 18 now or will be at the time of interview.

c) Will primary data be collected?

Yes

If NO, please go to Section 7 of this form.

4. Details of the participants in the study:

a) From what population will your participants be drawn?

The participants will all be connected to the [Primrose Project] and Circles UK.

b) How many participants will be involved in your study? Please provide an estimate.

Approximately: 30. There will be 4 core members, 4 professional staff at [Primrose Project], 4 professional staff outside of [Primrose Project] (key workers, social workers and probation officers) and 18 volunteers.

c) Are children aged 18 or under to be involved?

No

If yes, what ages will your participants be?

Please note: If you are conducting research with children (under the age of 18) or vulnerable adults you must undergo a police check. This takes 6 or more weeks.

I have had a CRB check completed for my work with [Primrose Project].

5. Access and consent:

Please attach a Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form to the application

a) Briefly describe how access will be gained to the participants.

The participants will all be working with [Primrose Project] on the CoSA projects.

b) Will informed consent be sought from any gatekeepers i.e. people in an organisation or institution who grant permission for the research?

Yes

If so, what gatekeepers?

[Primrose Project] representatives

Will you obtain written consent from the gatekeepers? Yes

If no - please explain why, and describe how consent will be obtained and ensured

c) Will informed consent be obtained directly from all participants. Yes

Will written consent be obtained from all participants?

Yes. I have one form for those participants who do not have learning disabilities and another form for those who do. Please see attached consent form for those core members who have a learning disability and are over 18.

If no - please explain why, and describe how consent will be obtained and ensured

d) Will payment or an incentive be offered to participants? No

If yes, please state amount of payment or type of incentive and provide justification

e) Length of session for an individual participant (if more than one session, please give number and nature of sessions and amount of time for each): Each session will last no longer than 60 minutes and there may be several sessions. There will be at least at least 3 months gap between each groups or individuals session. The interviews with the participants with learning disabilities will last no longer than 30 minutes.

f) In what locations will data gathering take place? I hope to carry out all the data gathering at [the Primrose Project Offices], however, there may be the odd occasion when I will have to meet with an individual outside of [Primrose Project Office]. Such a meeting will take place in a neutral safe place; a meeting room in another organisations offices, for example meeting a social worker in his/her offices of work.

**g) Will you inform your participants of their right to withdraw from the research?
Yes**

h) How will you guarantee confidentiality of information to your participants?

All participants will be advised that the content of the interviews and focus groups will be shared with [Primrose Project] and be part of my PhD therefore enabling them to make the decision as to what they wish to disclose. After transcribing the interviews and focus groups I will forward the documents to the participants prior to disclosure to [Primrose Project]. The participants will then have the opportunity to amend or delete any part of the transcribed document. If there is something that the participant specifically does not want attributed to them, but is happy for me to use in my study, I will anonymise the disclosure to [Primrose Project] ensuring that the individual is referred to simply as a "participant". Therefore the participant has the choice of having their transcript either deleted or used, and if used, attributed to them (within Primrose Project only) or not.

i) How will you guarantee anonymity to your participants?

I will not include any material which will identify the participants in documentation that is published externally, outside of [Primrose Project]. All names will be replaced by numbers in written documentation and any potentially identifying features of the participants will be removed in the final draft. If as detailed above the participant does not his/her statement or interview/focus group to be attributed to them within [Primrose Project] I will use the term "participant" rather than identifying number.

6. Safety and legal issues

Please attach the completed risk assessment form to this application

a) Will you be alone with a participant? Yes

b) Will you be alone with a group of participants? Yes

c) What safety issues if any does your methodology raise for you and for your participants? The biggest safety issue is the possibility of being alone with the Core Member. If this is the case then the protocols established by the [Primrose Project] will be strictly followed. Please see attached [Primrose Project] Lone Worker Policy and Procedure.

d) What legal issues if any, does your methodology raise for you and your participants? None.

7. Codes of ethics

a) I confirm that I have read and understood at least one of the following:

The British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice?

Available at <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/801B9A62-5CD3-4BC2-93E1-FF470FF10256/0/StatementofEthicalPractice.pdf>

The Code of Ethics for Researchers in the Field of Criminology by the British Society of Criminology? Available at

<http://www.britsoccrim.org/docs/CodeofEthics.pdf>

The Social Research Association Ethical Guidelines

Available at: <http://www.the-sra.org.uk/documents/pdfs/ethics03.pdf>)

Another set of ethics guidelines appropriate to your research topic (Please specify)

I confirm that I have read and understood the British Sociological Association Statement of Ethical Practice.b) Are there any ethical issues which concern you about this particular piece of research? Yes

If yes, please specify:

This research will mean that I will interview individuals who have learning disabilities. I will obtain confirmation from [Primrose Project] representatives, practicing psychotherapists, that in their professional opinion the individual is capable of giving informed consent. I will endeavour to interview each of these individuals twice within the course of the project which will mean 6 interviews in total (3 participants). I will strenuously ensure that they provide informed consent to being interviewed and obtain written consent. The consent forms will be in a format suitable to the needs individual. I will go over each section of the form and ensure that the individual understands each point highlighted. There are 10 questions for the core member, I will read these prior to commencement to ensure that the participant is comfortable with the nature of these questions. The interviews will be relatively short, 30 minutes long, and if at any point within the interview I believe that the individual is becoming distressed or uncomfortable I will stop the interview either for a short break, until another time or, if appropriate, terminate the process completely with the particular individual. After transcribing the interview I will endeavour to ensure that I meet with the participant to read back his answers to the questions and that verify that he is still happy with me using the information. I will review the process after each interview in order to consider and facilitate any improvements. I would suggest without the core members comments this study would be incomplete; they should be recognised and have an opportunity to discuss their feelings and thoughts. They are the central point of the circle of support and accountability.

The bulk of the work will be undertaken with the volunteers, [Primrose Project] representatives and other professionals all of which will be over 18.

If at any point I have any particular ethical concern I will raise this with the University and will, on a regular basis, discuss ethical matters with either my supervisor or other University representative to ensure continuing focus is given to this matter.

Ethical issues will be reviewed continually throughout the project with both my supervisors and members of the Ethics committee.

Student Declaration:

I believe the information given above to be true. The methodology outlined above will be the methodology used in my research. I will notify my supervisor/ethics sub-Committee of any proposed changes to this methodology.

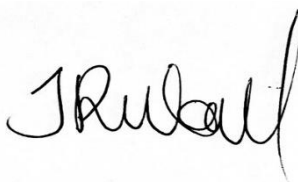
Signature of Student:

Date: 3/6/2014



Supervisor Declaration:

- As supervisor for this research study I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that students under my supervision undertake a risk assessment to ensure that health and safety of themselves, participants and others is not jeopardised during the course of this study.
- I confirm that I have seen and signed a risk assessment for this research study using standard university forms and to the best of my knowledge appropriate action has been taken to minimise any identified risks or hazards.
- I understand that, where applicable, it is my responsibility to ensure that the study is conducted in a manner that is consistent with established ethical guidelines
- I confirm that I have reviewed all of the information submitted as part of this research ethics application.
- I understand that research records/data may be subject to inspection for audit purposes and I agree to participate in any audit procedures required by the SHSS ethics Committee if requested.



Signature of Supervisor(s):

Date: 8th June 2014



Please note: **The application must be approved by ALL supervisors and ALL supervisors must sign the application form. Students being supervised across subject areas MUST obtain the agreement of BOTH supervisors.**

NB. If the project involves primary research it will also need to be signed by a member of the Dept. of Criminology and Sociology and Dept. of Social Sciences Ethics Subcommittee.

Counter-signed by (member of ethics subcommittee):



Signature

Date

Passed by Dept. of Criminology and Sociology and Dept. of Social Sciences Ethics Subcommittee

Staff Declaration:

I believe the information given above to be true. The methodology outlined above will be the methodology used in my research. I will notify the ethics sub-Committee of any proposed changes to this methodology.

Signature of (lead) investigator	Name (please print)	Date
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All Middlesex University employees involved in the research must sign the completed form:

Signature	Name (please print)	Date
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If the project involves primary research it will also need to be signed by the Chair of the Dept. of Criminology and Sociology and Dept. of Social Sciences Ethics Subcommittee and counter-signed by at least one other member of the Subcommittee.

Signature Chair of Ethics Subcommittee	Date
--	------

Counter-signed by member of ethics subcommittee:		
Name	Signature	Date

Passed by Dept. of Criminology and Sociology and Dept. of Social Sciences Ethics Subcommittee

Appendix – 7

Volunteer and Co-ordinator Focus Group and Interview Consent Forms

Consent Form

CoSA Project

The research project has been explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	Yes	
I understand that I don't have to take part in this study and that I can opt out at any time. I understand that I don't have to give a reason for opting out.	Yes	
I give my permission for information collected to be stored or electronically processed for the purpose research and to be used in related studies.	Yes	
I understand that the focus group discussion will be recorded and that any written transcript will be anonymised. I also understand that this recording will be destroyed upon completion of the research study.	Yes	

I agree to take part in the study

/

/

Name (Block Capitals)

/ Signature

/ Date

Consent Form

CoSA Project

The research project has been explained to me and I have been able to ask questions, all of which have been answered to my satisfaction.	Yes	
I understand that I don't have to take part in this study and that I can opt out at any time. I understand that I don't have to give a reason for opting out.	Yes	
I give my permission for information collected to be stored or electronically processed for the purpose research and to be used in related studies.	Yes	
I understand that the interview discussion will be recorded and that any written transcript will be anonymised. I also understand that this recording will be destroyed upon completion of the research study.	Yes	

I agree to take part in the study

/

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Name (Block Capitals)

/ Signature

/ Date

Appendix 8 – Core Member Consent Form

My name is Susan Hillyard

[picture of Susan Hillyard]

I work with [Primrose Project] and Middlesex University

I would like to know what you think about being in a circle?
(The term circle is used to mean when people meet with you to talk about how things are going).



I would really like to hear about what you think of your circle and the people you have got to know through your circle. This will be part of my university study and your comments may be used by me in a book I am writing and talks I shall give.



I would like to ask you some questions to find out what you think about your circle.

You do not have to answer the questions. You can say NO if there are any questions you do not want to answer.



The information you give can be anonymous. This means that you do not have to tell me your name and I will not use your name in my book or talks.



You can answer all of the questions, some of the questions or none of the questions. It is up to you.

I will record what you say to me as it is important that I do not forget or misunderstand what you are saying. Only I will listen to the recording. I will write down what we have talked about.



After I have written down what we have talked about we can meet again and I can read it to you. If you answer the questions today, but then change your mind later and don't want me to use your answers you can tell me when I read it through with you and I will put your answers in the bin.



You do not have to answer the questions today. You can go away and think about it.



"I understand what this study is about."

Please circle yes if you are happy that you understand why I am asking you questions and no if you do not understand.

Yes

No

I would like to answer questions in this study.

Please circle yes if you would be happy to talk to me and answer my questions and no if you do not want to answer my questions.

Yes

No

Today's date is:

Signed:

The questions

Q1. What do you like about your circle?

Q2. What things don't you like about your circle?

Q3. Was it easy to talk to the volunteers when you first started your circle?

Q4. Did talking to them get easier?

Q5. Did you find talking to just one volunteer easier or were you happy to talk to the group?

Q6. Did you enjoy the circle meetings?

Q7. Did you like going out and doing things with the volunteers?

Q8. Do you think your circle has helped you?

Q9. Have you got any suggestions that would make the circle better?

Q10. Have you got anything to say about the circle that we have not already talked about?

Thank you

Appendix 9 – Focus Group Questions/Topics

Questions for First Volunteer Focus Group

1. Motivation for volunteering for the project. Religious belief, humanist approach, professional interest, survivor of sexual abuse, child protection, safer communities, personal interest, enhancement of personal and career prospects, make new friends of a similar outlook, guilt (being for fortunate than others)
2. What sort of skills do they bring to the CoSA; mentoring, listening, establishing a respectful and non-judgemental relationship with the CM.
3. Thoughts on the CoSA process. What do they know about it? Its relationship to Restorative Justice.
4. How do you think working with Young People and Young People with Learning Disabilities will change the process? Or affect the way you interact with the CM? How will this impact on communication.
5. Accountability and support how do you think you will be able to cope with these two areas? How comfortable do you feel about confronting certain behaviour? How to the feel about their risk management role?
6. Working as part of a group is important within a CoSA – how do you feel this works, do you think this will be a problem or an advantage?
7. What do they believe to be the most beneficial and potentially successful elements of a CoSA? To them, to the CM and to the community.
8. How easy do you think it will be to build relationships with the CM and with each other?
9. What sort of impact do they believe being a volunteer will have upon them? Worries about becoming a volunteer for a CoSA? Not seeing past the possible offence to the CM, not being able to cope with discussion of the offence, not being able to develop a productive relationship with the CM, not liking or getting on with the other volunteers.
10. What factors do they believe would contribute towards offending/reoffending.
11. How do they think family and friends will respond to their role as a volunteer in a CoSA and how will this affect them?
12. How confident do they feel about confronting certain behaviour and adhering to boundaries and issues of confidentiality.

Second Volunteer Focus Group Questions

1. How was meeting your CM?
2. How has this relationship developed?
3. What are your feelings about the process generally?
4. How do you feel that the CoSA process has enabled you to support the CM?
5. Accountability, how have you managed to achieve this and has there been any problems/successes?
6. Reintegration is part of the Restorative Justice Model, is this possible with your CM?
7. Do you have any tools which assist in the CoSA process, thinking of the DRR. Does this help, how comfortable do feel about using these forms, do they generate any questions/issues you may not have discussed if it were not for the form.
8. How do you feel you have responded as a group, have there been any problems/successes with the group structure.
9. How do you manage the changes in the group - did you feel about giving your number and changing to one to ones?
10. Motivation – has being part of the Circle met your reasons for becoming a volunteer?
11. How do you friends/family now see your involvement in the CoSA process?
12. How have you managed the issue of boundaries? Has this caused you any problems?
13. How do you feel about ending the Circle? Does it concern you?
14. Would you volunteer for another Circle once this one has finished?

Final Focus Group Questions – Focus Group 3

1. Return to motivations
What were they? Did the circle fulfil your motivational expectations?
2. How did you find ending the circle?
Was it planned – how did you plan it?
How did it leave you feeling?
How do you feel now that you look back on your circle?
3. Was your circle a support or accountability circle?
4. What do you think the successes of your circle were?
More self-esteem, less isolation, change in behaviours, enhancement of abilities (communication), greater understanding of behaviours and effects on others.....
5. Relationships within the circle – what were they like?
6. Risk Management
Did this happen in your circle?
Can you see how this happens in other circles?
Were risks highlighted and evaluated?
Did his risk change over the course of the circle and were you able to manage the risks?
7. Any more thoughts about Restorative Justice
Could you see any RJ objectives within your circle?
Do they think that there is always a need for a victim?
Have they been able to educate a wider group of people – spread the understanding of the project?
8. Was there anything Primrose co-ordinator could have done to improve the experience for them as volunteers?

Appendix 10 - Sample Meeting Minute Template

Circles Meeting Record

Date of Meeting

Circle Members Present

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Record of Phone Contact

Volunteer	Number of calls received from Core Member in period	Notes

General Notes/Observations

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Action Agreed

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Risk Issues
(Areas of Concern)

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Action Agreed

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Signed - Circle Representative

.....

Core Member

Date

Date

Appendix 11 - Circle Review Minute Template

Circle Review

Date of Review:

Present:

1. Past meetings – attendance, minutes etc (to be completed by circle coordinator)

2. Go around – how is everyone feeling about how the circle has been going? All members are to be encouraged to be honest and open about their feelings and anything that they feel is not working as it should. They should also be encouraged to comment on what they feel is working well within the Circle and identify the progress they feel has been made.

3. Core member – do you think your needs are being met in the circle? Is there anything you would like to be done differently?

4. Outer circle – how does the circle appear to be functioning from the outside? Positives, Challenges & Communication
5. Is the balance between support and accountability being achieved?
6. Look at the possibility of contact & activities – is it at a stage where this is wanted and appropriate?
7. Feedback – It is important that the Circle receive feedback from the Circle Coordinator regarding their progress and again this provides an opportunity to discuss any concerns or recommended areas of work.

Appendix 12 – Supervision Minutes Template

Line Management Supervision Form

To be completed during each line management supervision and signed by both the manager and staff member

Date	
Line Manager	
Supervisee	
Date for next supervision	

Agenda Items

Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How have you found your experience as a Circles Volunteer? • What have been the positives for you within this role?• What have you found most challenging about your Circle work?
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How have you found establishing a relationship with the Core Member? Have there been any difficulties for you?• How are you managing the potential impact of Circles work? Are you finding any information or details particularly difficult to cope with?• How would you describe the relationship you have with other Circles Volunteers?• Do you feel that the Circle are working well as a team and supporting each other?
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you identified any training needs • What do you understand to be the aims and motivation of the Core Member? • How are you achieving the aims/goals of Circle specific issues regarding support, accountability and risk management?
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What issues do you feel need to be addressed within the Circle • Do you have anything further that you wish to discuss?
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Action Points

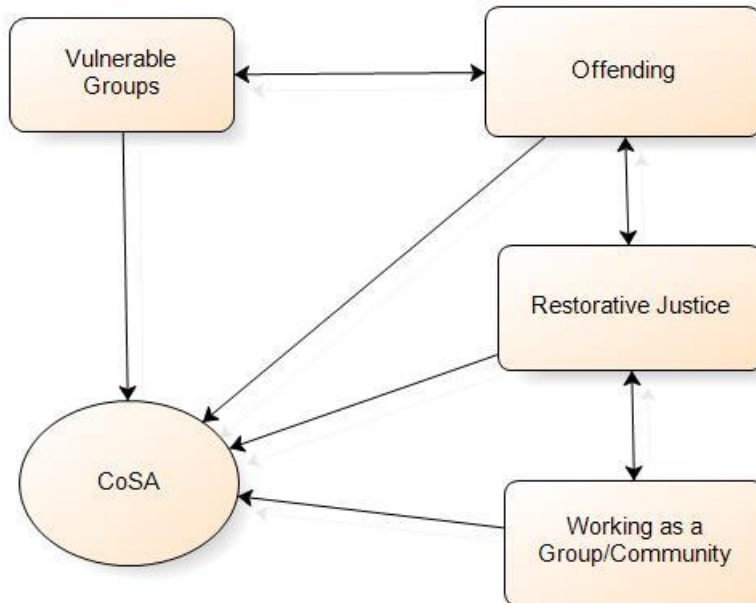
Coordinator	
Volunteer	

Signed

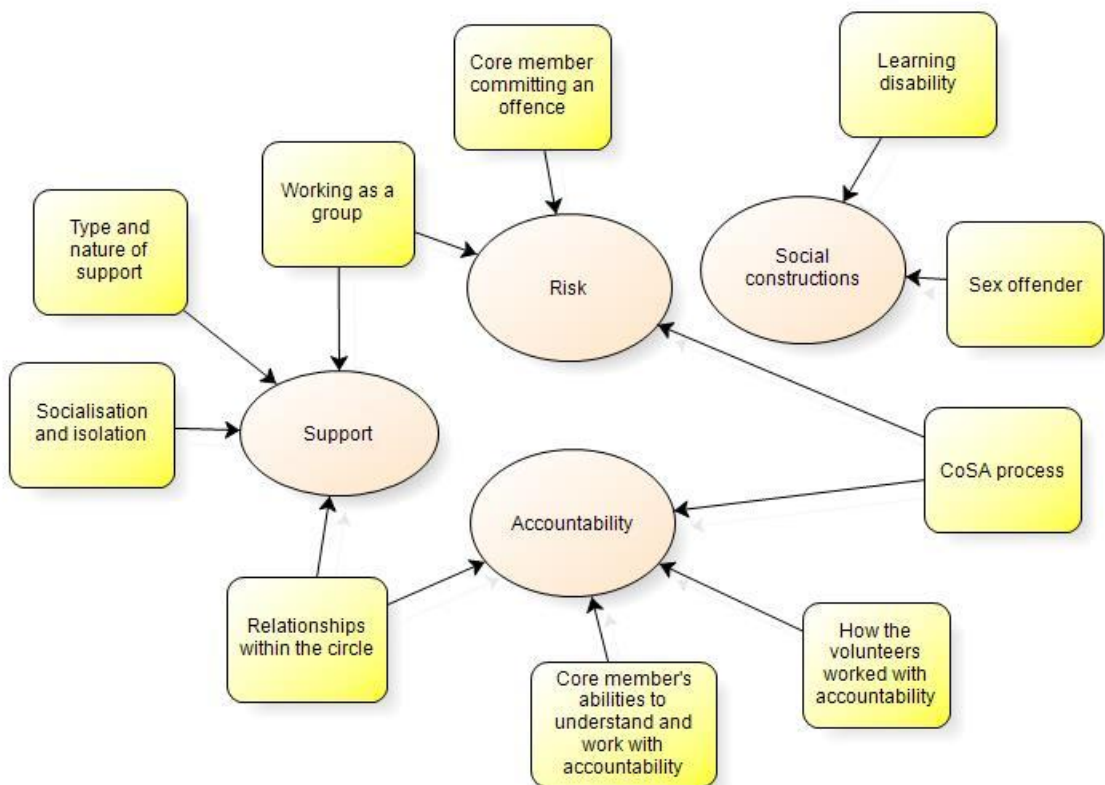
Coordinator	
Volunteer	

Appendix 13 - Analysis Themes

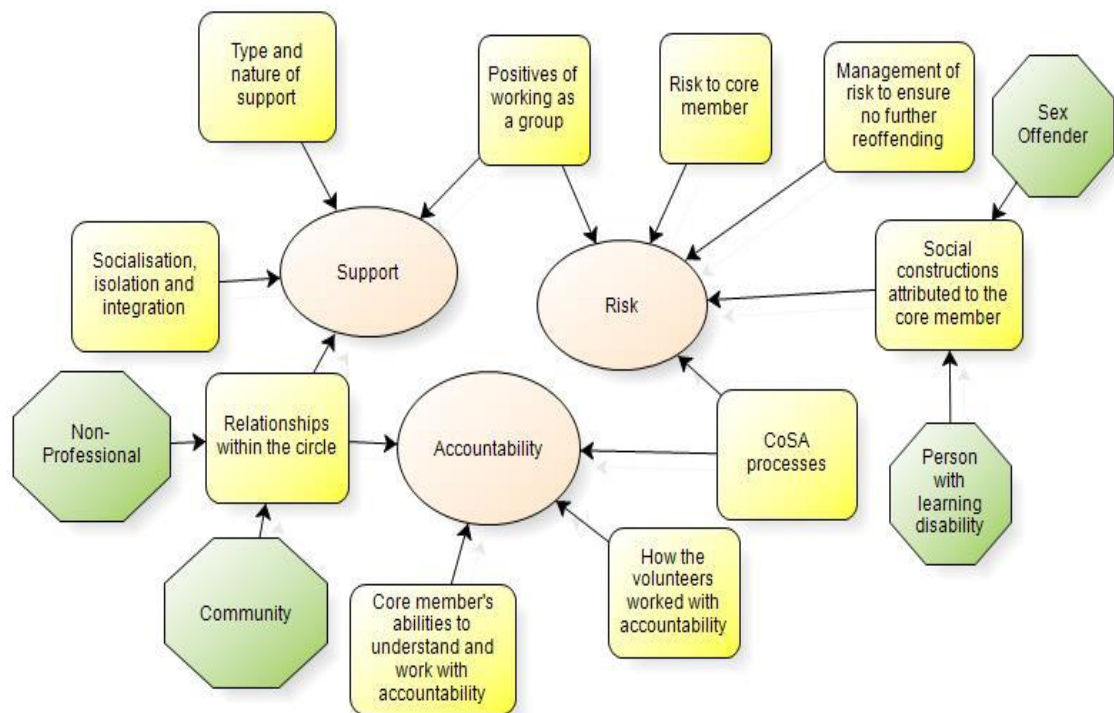
First Set of Analysis Themes



Second Set of Analysis Themes



Third Set of Analysis Themes



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